**Dramatis Personae**

**OEDIPUS**, banished King of Thebes

**ANTIGONE**, his daughter

**ISMENE**, his daughter

**THESEUS**, King of Athens

**CREON**, brother of Jocasta, now reigning at Thebes

**Polynices**, elder son of Oedipus

**STRANGER**, a native of Colonus

**MESSENGER**, an attendant of Theseus

**CHORUS**, citizens of Colonus

Sophocles, ***Oedipus******at Colonus***

**[SCENE 1]**

***Scene: In front of the grove of the Eumenides.***[Eumenides = vengeful spirits, a. k. a. Furies or Erinyes]

***Enter the blind Oedipus led by his daughter, Antigone.***



**OEDIPUS:** Antigone, Child of an old blind sire,   
What region, say, whose city have we reached?  
Who will provide today with scanted dole                     [scanted = meager; dole = alms, offerings]  
This wanderer? 'Tis little that he craves,                      [this wanderer = Oedipus]  
And less obtains—that less enough for me;  
For I am **taught by suffering** to endure,                         [tragic theme: suffering > wisdom]  
And the long years that have grown old with me,  
And last not least, by true nobility.  
My daughter, if you see a resting place  
On common ground or by some sacred grove,                                              10  
Stop me and set me down. Let us discover  
Where we have come, for strangers must inquire  
Of the natives, and do as they are bid.

**ANTIGONE:** Long-suffering father Oedipus, the towers  
That fence the city still are faint and far;                            [the city = Athens]  
But **where we stand is surely holy ground;**A wilderness of laurel, olive, vine;  
Within a choir of songster nightingales  
Are warbling. **On this native seat of rock, rest.  
For an old man you have traveled far.**                                                             20

**OEDIPUS:**Guide these dark steps and seat me there secure.

**ANTIGONE:**If time can teach, I need not to be told.

**OEDIPUS:**Say, prithee, if you know, where we are.     [prithee = I pray thee]

**ANTIGONE: Athens I recognize**, but not the spot.      [Athens: where the play was performed]

**OEDIPUS:**That much we heard from every wayfarer.

**ANTIGONE:**Shall I go on and ask about the place?

**OEDIPUS:**Yes, daughter, if it be inhabited.

**ANTIGONE:**Sure there are habitations; but no need  
To leave thee; yonder is a man nearby.

**OEDIPUS:**What, moving hitherward and on his way?     [hitherward = in this direction]    30

**ANTIGONE:** Say rather, here already. Ask him straight  
The needful questions, for the man is here.

**[Enter STRANGER]**

**OEDIPUS:** O stranger, as I learn from her whose eyes  
Must serve both her and me, that you are here  
Sent by some happy chance to serve our doubts—

**STRANGER: First leave that place you rest**, then question me at large:  
**The spot you tread on is holy ground.**

**OEDIPUS:**What is the site, **to what god dedicated?**

**STRANGER:**Inviolable, untrod; goddesses,  
**Dread brood of Earth and Darkness**, here abide.     [brood = Furies as children of original divine beings]     40

**OEDIPUS:**Tell me the awful name I should invoke?

**STRANGER:**The Gracious Ones, All-seeing, so our folk         [Gracious Ones = Furies\*]  
Call them, but elsewhere other names are rife.      
[\*Many [euphemisms](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/terms/E/euphemism.htm) or inoffensive names were attached to the Furies who, as vengeful spirits of the dead, must be spoken of carefully]

**OEDIPUS:**Then may they show hospitality, for I           
From this your sanctuary will never depart.

**STRANGER:**What do you mean?     
  
**OEDIPUS:**I do as my fate commands.

**STRANGER:**Nay, 'tis not my duty to drive thee away\* without   
Due warrant and instruction from the State.             [the State = local authorities, in this case Athens]  
[Stranger basically says, "I wouldn't bother you except for the law.]

**OEDIPUS:**Now in God's name, O stranger, scorn me not                                    50  
As a wayfarer; tell me what I need to know.

**STRANGER:**Ask—your request shall not be scorned by me.

**OEDIPUS: What do you call the place where we are?**

**STRANGER:**Whatever I know, you too shall know; the place  
Is all **to great Poseidon consecrated**.        [Poseidon, sea god important to Athens; consecrated=devoted]  
Nearby, the **Titan**, he who bears the torch,    [Titan Prometheus stole fire from gods and gave it to humanity]  
Prometheus, has his worship; but the spot                      
You tread, the Brass-footed Threshold named,            [Brass-footed Threshold=protected]  
Is **Athens's bastion**, and the neighboring lands             [bastion = stronghold]  
Claim as their chief and patron yonder knight                                                           60  
Colonus, and in common bear his name.                      [yonder knight Colonus = namesake of area]  
Such, stranger, is the spot, to fame unknown,              [to fame unknown = secluded]  
But dear to us its native worshipers.

**OEDIPUS:**You say people live in these parts?

**STRANGER:**Surely; they bear the name of yonder god.       [yonder god=Athena>Athenians]

**OEDIPUS:**Ruled by a king or by the general voice?               [general voice = democracy]

**STRANGER:**The lord of Athens is our over-lord.                     [lord = king]

**OEDIPUS:**Who is this monarch, great in word and might?

**STRANGER: Theseus**, the son of Aegeus our late king.

**OEDIPUS:**Might one be sent from you to **summon him?**                                          70

**STRANGER:**Wherefore? To tell him aught or urge his coming?

**OEDIPUS:**Say that a small service may avail him much.    [i.e., if Theseus will help Oedipus, Theseus and AThens will be rewarded]

**STRANGER: How can he profit from a sightless man?**

**OEDIPUS:**The blind man's words will be gifted with sight.     [compare Teiresias in *Oedipus the King* & *Antigone*]

**STRANGER:**Heed then; I fain would see thee out of harm;  
**For by the looks, marred though they be by fate,  
I judge thee noble.**Tarry where you are,                               [tarry = linger]  
While I go seek the burghers—those at hand,                     [burghers = established citizens]  
Not in the city. They will soon decide  
Whether you are to rest or go your way.                                                                      80

***[Exit STRANGER]***

**http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/ximages/decor/strips/Rainbow_Thin.gif**

**[SCENE 2]**

**OEDIPUS:**Tell me, my daughter, has the stranger gone?

**ANTIGONE:**Yes, he has gone; now we are all alone,  
And you may speak, dear father, without fear.

[Oedipus in the **speech below** addresses the Furies, spirits of justice inhabiting the sacred grove and refers to the Oracle at Delphi, who prophesied the grove as his final resting place.]

**OEDIPUS:**Stern-faced queens, since coming to this land            [queens = the Furies]  
First in your sanctuary I bent the knee,                                   [bent the knee = prayed, did homage]  
Frown not on me or **Phoebus**, who, when erst            [Phoebus = Apollo, chief divinity of Delphi; erst = formerly]  
He told me all my miseries to come,  
**Spake of this respite after many years,**                   [respite = opportunity for rest or relief]  
**Some haven in a far-off land**, a rest  
Vouchsafed at last by dread divinities.                                                                             90

**"There," said he, "shalt thou complete thy weary life,**     [he = Apollo (via oracle)] **A blessing to the land wherein thou dwellest,  
But to the land that cast thee forth, a curse."**                        [blessing / curse motif]  
And of my fate he promised signs should come,         
Earthquake, or thunderclap, or lightning flash.     [see act 9, l. 1598; act 11, 1650]

And now I recognize as yours the sign                                       [yours = the Furies']       
That led my wanderings to this your grove;  
Else had I never lighted on you first,  
A wineless man on your seat of native rock.                         [wineless = not honored]

O goddesses, fulfill Apollo's word,                                                                                       100  
**Grant me some redemption of my life**,      
If by chance I appear not all too vile,                              
A captive to sorrow worse than any slave.             
Hear, gentle daughters of primeval Night,                            [daughters = Furies]  
Hear, namesake of great Pallas; **Athens, first**     [namesake= Athena, patron goddess of Athens] **Of cities**, pity this dishonored ghost,                                 
The shadow of him who once was Oedipus.

**ANTIGONE:**Hush! for I see some elders on their way,    
Their mission to find out our resting-place.

**OEDIPUS:**I will be mute, and you shall guide my steps     [contrast Oedipus's earlier, bolder, hot-tempered nature] 110  
Into the covert from the public road,                                   [covert = thicket, hiding place]  
Till I have learned their drift. A prudent man  
Will ever shape his course by what he learns.                  [learning theme of tragedy]

***[Enter Chorus]***    [as in other plays of the Theban trilogy, **the Chorus = local elders**]

**CHORUS: *(Strophe 1)***   [strophe = part of choral ode or song, as Chorus moves left to right]  
Ha! Where is he? Look around!                      [he = Oedipus, not yet identified]  
Every nook and corner scan!  
**He the all-presumptuous man**,       [Oedipus re-enacts his original sin by trespassing on sacred ground]  
Whither vanished? search the ground!             [Whither vanished? = Where's he gone?]  
A wayfarer, I imagine,                                                [wayfarer = wanderer]  
A wayfarer, no countryman of ours,  
That old man must have been;                                                                                              120  
Never had native dared to tempt the Powers,             [the Powers = the sacred Furies]  
Or enter their domain,           
The Maids in awe of whom each mortal cowers,        [the Maids = again, the Furies]  
Whose name no voice betrays nor cry,  
And as we pass them with averted eye,  
We move hushed lips in reverent piety.

But **now some godless man,**     [Oedipus, his identity still unknown to Athenian chorus] **It’s rumored, here abides**;  
The precincts through I scan,  
Yet know not where he hides,                                                            130  
The wretch profane!  
I search and search in vain.



**1962 performance of "Oedipus at Colonus" at Athens.**

**OEDIPUS:**I am that man; I know you're near  
Ears to the blind, they say, are eyes.

**CHORUS: O dreadful to see and to hear!**             [[spectacle](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/terms/S/spectacle.htm)?]

**OEDIPUS:**Oh sirs, **I am no outlaw** under banishment.

**CHORUS:**Who can he be —Zeus save us!—this old man?

**OEDIPUS:**No favorite of fate,  
That ye should envy his estate,  
O, Sirs, would any happy mortal, say,                                           140  
Grope by the light of other eyes his way,  
Or face the storm upon so frail a stay?                      [stay = rope supporting a ship's mast]

**CHORUS: *(Antistrophe 1)***   **[antistrophe=response to strophe; Chorus moves right to left]**  
Were you then sightless from your birth?  
**Evil, methinks, and long  
Thy pilgrimage on earth.  
Yet add not curse to curse and wrong to wrong.  
I warn thee, trespass not  
Within this hallowed spot,**  
Lest you should find the silent grassy glade             [the sacred grove as sanctuary of gods or spirits]  
Where **offerings** are laid,                                                                      150  
Bowls of spring water mingled with sweet mead.       [mead = fermented drink of water, honey, malt, yeast]  
You must not stay,  
Come, come away,  
Tired wanderer, do you hear?

(We stand far off, but sure our voice can reach.)  
If anything you would beseech,                                    [beseech = request]  
Speak where it is right; till then refrain from speech.

**OEDIPUS:**Daughter, what counsel should we now pursue?

**ANTIGONE:**We must obey and do as here they do.

**OEDIPUS:**Your hand then!                                                 160

**ANTIGONE:**Here, O father, is my hand.

**OEDIPUS:**O Sirs, if I come forth at your command,  
Let me not suffer for my trust in you.

**CHORUS: *(Strophe 2) [strophe = part of choral ode or song, as Chorus moves left to right]***[dance]  
**Against thy will no man shall drive thee hence.**164

**OEDIPUS:**Shall I go further?

**CHORUS:**Aye.

**OEDIPUS:**What, further still?

**CHORUS:**Lead, maiden, you can guide him where we intend.

**ANTIGONE:**Follow with blind steps, father, as I lead.

**CHORUS: In a strange land, strange thou art;**         [cf. Exodus 2:22]          170  
To her will, incline thy heart;                      [her will = the laws of the land]  
Honor whatsoever the State  
Honors, all she frowns on hate.                [she = the State]

**OEDIPUS:**Guide me child, where we may range  
Safe within the paths of right;  
Counsel freely may exchange  
Nor with fate and fortune fight.

**CHORUS: *(Antistrophe 2) [Chorus moves right to left]***  
Halt! Go no further than that rocky floor.              [floor = ground]

**OEDIPUS:**Stay where I now am?

**CHORUS:**Yes, advance no more.                                                180

**OEDIPUS:**May I sit down?

**CHORUS:**Move sideways towards the ledge,  
And sit thee crouching on the scarped edge.            [scarped = steeply sloped]

**ANTIGONE:**This is my office, father, O incline—    [office=duty] [O incline=please conform]

**OEDIPUS:**Ah me! ah me!

**ANTIGONE: Thy steps to my steps, lean thine aged frame on mine.**

**OEDIPUS:**Woe on my fate unblest!

**CHORUS:**Wanderer, now thou art at rest,  
**Tell me of thy birth and home,**From what far country art thou come,                                              190  
Led on thy weary way, declare!

**OEDIPUS: Strangers, I have no country.** O forbear—        [forbear = hold back, lay off]

**CHORUS: What is it, old man, that you would conceal?**

**OEDIPUS: Forbear, nor urge me further to reveal—**

**CHORUS:**Why this reluctance?

**OEDIPUS:**Dreadful my lineage.                       [lineage = family story, family curse]

**CHORUS:**Say!

**OEDIPUS:**What must I answer, child, ah welladay!            [welladay! = whatever!]

**CHORUS: Say of what stock you come, what man's son—**

**OEDIPUS: Ah me, my daughter, now we are undone!**                       200

**ANTIGONE:**Speak, for you stand on the slippery verge.         [verge = threshold; i.e., Oedipus stands at a point where fate may turn good or bad, fulfilled or frustrated]

**OEDIPUS:**I will; no plea for silence can I urge.

**CHORUS:**Will [you] neither speak? Come, Sir, why dally thus!

**OEDIPUS:**Know you of Laius's—

**CHORUS:**What? Who!

**OEDIPUS:**Seed of Labdacus—   [Laius, Oedipus’s father, was son of King Labdacus of Thebes]

**CHORUS:**Oh Zeus!

**OEDIPUS: The hapless Oedipus.**

**CHORUS: Are you he?**

**OEDIPUS: Whatever I utter, have no fear of me.**210

**CHORUS: Begone!**           [Recognition scene completes]

**OEDIPUS:**O wretched me!

**CHORUS:**Begone!

**OEDIPUS:**O daughter, what will happen next?

**CHORUS:**Forth from our borders speed ye both!

**OEDIPUS: How keep you then your pledge?**  [you, your = chorus; pledge=of refuge in sanctuary of grove; see l. 164]

**CHORUS:**Heaven's justice never smites           [smites = strikes]  
Him who ill with ill requites.                                 [requites = answers, retaliates]  
But if guile with guile contend,                            [guile = cunning, hypocrisy]  
Curse, not blessing, is the end.                            [bane = affliction, hardship]      220  
Arise, begone and take thee hence straightway,  
Lest on our land a heavier curse thou lay.          [lest = unless]

**ANTIGONE:**O sirs! ye suffered not my father blind,        [suffered = accepted]  
Albeit gracious and to ruth inclined,                                  [ruth = mercy]  
**Knowing the deeds he wrought, not innocent,  
But with no ill intent;**  
**Yet heed a maiden's moan**  
Who pleads for him alone;  
**My eyes, not void of sight,       
Plead with you as a daughter's might**230 **You are our providence,**                                                 [providence = caretaker]  
**O make us not go hence!**O with a gracious nod  
Grant us the nearly-despaired-of blessing we crave?     
Hear us, O hear,  
By all that ye hold dear,  
Wife, children, homestead, hearth and God!  
**Where will you find one, search ye never so well.  
Who escapes destruction if a god impel!**

**CHORUS:**Surely we pity thee and him alike                                          240  
Daughter of Oedipus, for your distress;  
But as we reverence the decrees of Heaven  
We cannot say aught other than we said.                    [aught = anything]

**OEDIPUS:**O what avails renown or fair repute?                     [renown = fame; repute = reputation]  
Are they not vanity? For, look you, now  
**Athens is held of States the most devout,  
Athens alone gives hospitality  
And shelters the troubled stranger**, so men say.  
Have I found so?  
                               I whom you uprooted                                                  250  
First from my seat of rock and now would drive  
Forth from your land, dreading my name alone;  
For me you surely dread not, nor my deeds,  
Deeds of **a man more sinned against than sinning**,   [more . . . sinning < cf. Shakespeare, *King Lear* 3.2 57-60]  
As I might well convince you, were it right  
To tell my mother's story and my father's,  
The cause of this your fear.  
                                               But **am I then  
A villain born because in self-defense,  
Stricken, I struck the striker back again?**  [Oedipus recalls his deadly fight with his father Laius]   260  
Even if I’d known, no villainy it would prove:

But all unknowing, wherever I went, I went—                   
To ruin; my destroyers knew it well,  
Wherefore, I pray you, sirs, in Heaven's name,  
Even as ye made me leave my seat, defend me.            
O pay not a lip service to the gods  
And wrong them of their dues.    [i.e., hospitality and mercy to suffering; just because one speaks of the gods' will doesn't mean that the gods might not intend otherwise]

**Bethink ye well**,  
The eye of Heaven beholds the just of men,  
And the unjust, **nor ever in this world**                                                270 **Has one sole godless sinner found escape.**  
Stand then on Heaven's side and never blot  
Athens's fair standard by abetting wrong.         
**I came to you a beggar, and you pledged                
Your honor**; O preserve me to the end,  
O let not this marred visage do me wrong!      [this marred visage = Oedipus’s wounded face]

**A holy and god-fearing man is here  
Whose coming purports comfort for your folk.**      [purports comfort = signifies blessings]  
**And when your chief arrives, whoever he be,**                [chief = king, later id. as Theseus]  
**Then shall ye have my story and know all.**                                             280  
Meanwhile I pray you do me no injury.

**CHORUS:**The plea thou urgest, needs must give us pause,  
Set forth in weighty argument, but we  
Must leave the issue with the ruling powers.

**OEDIPUS:**Where is he, strangers, he who sways the realm? [he = Theseus, king of Athens; sway the realm = rules this land]  
[**Instructor's note:**Beyond the tragedies, Oedipus shared many adventures with Theseus, legendary king of Athens]

**CHORUS:**In his ancestral seat—a messenger,  
The same who sent us here, is gone for him.

**OEDIPUS:**And think you he will have such care or thought  
For the blind stranger as to come himself?

**CHORUS:**Aye, that he will, when once he learns thy name.                     290

**OEDIPUS:**But who will bear him word!

**CHORUS:**The way is long,  
And many travelers pass to speed the news.  
Be sure he'll hear and hasten, never fear;  
**So wide and far thy name is spoken**  
That, were he never so tired and reluctant to move,       
He would stir himself when he hears of thee.             [he = Theseus; thee = Oedipus]

**OEDIPUS:**Well, may he come with blessing to his State  
And me! Who serves his neighbor serves himself.\*                                    299

[**\*Translator’s note:** To avoid the blessing, still a secret, [Oedipus] resorts to an epigram, literally,   
"For what generous man is not (in befriending others) a friend to himself?"]

**[SCENE 3]**

**ANTIGONE:**Zeus! **What is this?** What can I say or think?     [Zeus! = OMG!]       300

**OEDIPUS:**What now, Antigone?

**ANTIGONE: I see a woman             
Riding upon a colt** of Aetna's breed;      [Aetna = city in Sicily near Mount Aetna (volcano)]  
She wears for headgear a Thessalian hat      [<Thessaly, region of north-central Greece]  
To shade her from the sun. Who can it be?  
She or a stranger? **Do I wake or dream?**

**'Tis she; 'tis not —I cannot tell**, alack;  
It is no other! Now her bright'ning glance  
Greets me with recognition, **yes, 'tis she,  
Herself, Ismene!**             [Ismene = Antigone’s sister, Oedipus’s other daughter; recognition scene]  310

**OEDIPUS:**Ha! what say ye, child?

**ANTIGONE:**That **I behold thy daughter and my sister**,               [+ thy (Oedipus's) sister?]  
And you will know her straightway by her voice.

***[Enter Ismene ]***

**ISMENE: Father and sister, names to me most sweet,**  
How hardly have I found you—**I hardly now,**             [how hardly = with what difficulty] **When found at last, can see you through my tears!**

**OEDIPUS:**Art thou come, my child?

**ISMENE:**O father, sad thy plight!

**OEDIPUS:**Child, thou art here?

**ISMENE:**Yes, it was a weary way.                                320

**OEDIPUS:**Touch me, my child.

**ISMENE:**I give a hand to both.

**OEDIPUS: O children—sisters!**

**ISMENE:**O disastrous plight!

**OEDIPUS:**Her plight and mine?

**ISMENE:**Aye, and my own no less.

**OEDIPUS: What brought thee, daughter?**

**ISMENE: Father, care for thee.**                              [care = concern]

**OEDIPUS:**A daughter's yearning?

**ISMENE:**Yes, and I had **news**                                  330  
I would myself deliver, so I came  
With the one thrall who yet is true to me.                [thrall = servant-slave]

**OEDIPUS: Thy valiant brothers**, where are they at need?

**ISMENE:**They are—enough! '**Tis now their darkest hour.**       [enough! = Don't ask!]

**OEDIPUS:**Those two! Wouldn't you know!     
The thoughts and actions all   
Are framed and modeled on Egyptian ways.    [Greeks thought Egyptian gender roles were crossed-up?]  
For there the men sit at the loom indoors        
While the wives slave abroad for daily bread.

So you, my children—those sons whom I expected              340  
To bear the burden, stay at home like girls,  
While in their stead my daughters do hard and menial work  
To lighten their father's misery. **The one**                          [The one = **Antigone**]  
Since first she grew from girlish feebleness  
To womanhood has been the old man's guide  
And **shared my weary wandering, roaming oft  
Hungry and footsore through wild forest ways,  
In drenching rains and under scorching suns,  
Careless herself of home and ease**, if so  
Her sire might have her tender ministry.                            350

And **you, my child**, I remember you went forth,       [my child = **Ismene**]  
Eluding the Cadmeians' vigilance,                           [Eluding . . . vigilance = in secret]  
To **bring thy father all the oracles**  
**Concerning Oedipus**, and didst make thyself  
**My faithful spy**, when they banished me.      [spy: Ismene informed Oedipus of events in his old palace]

And now what mission summons thee from home,  
**What news, Ismene, do you have for your father?**This much I know, you come not empty-handed,  
Without **a warning of some new alarm.**

**ISMENE:**The toil and trouble, father, that I bore                 360  
To find thy lodging-place and how you fared,  
I spare thee; surely it would be a double pain  
To suffer, first in act and then in telling;

It is **the misfortune of thine ill-starred sons**   [ill-starred = doomed; sons = Eteocles & Polynices]  
I come to tell thee.   
                                At first they willed                  [they = Eteocles & Polynices; willed = wanted]  
To leave the throne to Creon, minded well  
Thus to remove the inveterate curse of old,  
A canker that infected all thy race.        [canker = malignant sore or infection; thy race = House of Cadmus]

But **now some god and an infatuate soul**            [infatuate soul = crazed spirit]  
**Have stirred betwixt them a mad rivalry**              [betwixt them = between Eteocles & Polynices] 370  
**To grasp at sovereignty and kingly power.**  
Today the hot-branded youth, the younger born, [younger=Eteocles, one of Oedipus’s sons]  
Is keeping Polynices from the throne,              [Polynices = Oedipus’s other son]  
His elder, and has thrust him from the land.

**The banished brother** (so all Thebes reports)         [banished brother = Polynices]  
**Fled to the vale of Argos**, and by help    [vale = valley or dale; Argos = harbor city of S. Greece, site of *Agamemnon*]  
Of new alliance there and friends in arms,  
Swears **to establish Argos straight as lord**          [straight = directly; Argos rule Thebes with Polynices installed]  
**Of the Cadmeian land**, or, if he fail,  
Exalt the victor to the stars of heaven.                                380  
This is no empty tale, but deadly truth,  
My father; and how long thy agony,  
Ere the gods pity thee, I cannot tell.

**OEDIPUS:**Have you indeed then entertained a hope  
The gods at last will turn and rescue me?

**ISMENE:**Yea, so I read **these latest oracles.**

**OEDIPUS:**What oracles? **What has been uttered, child?**

**ISMENE: Thy country (so it runs) shall yearn in time**    [Thy country = Thebes] **To have thee for their weal alive or dead.**\*                       [weal = well-being, protection]

[\*According to the Oracle, Thebes (and whoever wants to rule it) will want Oedipus as a patron saint or a blessing. Even if Oedipus is dead, his presence will deliver power to whoever protects him, a variation or distortion on the oracle that Oedipus has previously heard that, if he is buried at Colonus, he will provide a blessing to that area including Athens. This aspect of the Oedipus legend provides some background for the presence of mystery cults in ancient Greece dedicated to Oedipus, especially at sites that competed with each other in claiming to be his final resting-place.]

**OEDIPUS:**And who could gain by such a one as I?              390

**ISMENE: On thee, 'tis said, their rulership depends.**

**OEDIPUS:**So, when I cease to be, my worth begins.      [[irony](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/terms/I/irony.htm)]

**ISMENE: The gods, who once abased, uplift thee now.** [[romance](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/terms/R/romance.htm) of transcendence?]

**OEDIPUS:**Poor help to raise an old man fallen in youth.

**ISMENE:**However that be, it is for this cause alone  
That **Creon comes to thee**—and comes directly.

**OEDIPUS:**With what intent, my daughter? Tell me plainly.

**ISMENE:**To plant thee near the Theban land, and so  
Keep thee within their grasp, yet not allow  [Creon would hold Oedipus near but not inThebes, a best-of-both-worlds arrangement]  
Thy foot to pass beyond their boundaries.                             400

**OEDIPUS: What gain they, if I lay outside?**

**ISMENE: Thy tomb,   
If disregarded, brings on them a curse.**  
[another best-of-both-worlds arrangement: Thebes will not be cursed for neglect if Oedipus’s tomb is forgotten outside Thebes]

**OEDIPUS:**It needs no god to tell what's plain to sense.

**ISMENE:**Therefore they fain would have you close at hand,      [fain would = would be well-disposed to]  
Not where you would be master of yourself.

**OEDIPUS: Mean they to shroud my bones in Theban dust?** [shroud . . . dust? = bury my body in Theban soil?]

**ISMENE:**Nay, father, **guilt of kinsman's blood** forbids.  [Oedipus can’t be buried in Thebes because he killed his father]

**OEDIPUS:**Then never shall they be my masters, never!

**ISMENE:**Thebes, you will regret this bitterly some day!

**OEDIPUS:**When what conjunction comes to pass, my child?           410

**ISMENE:**Thy angry ghost, when at thy tomb they stand. . . .

[**Translator’s note on dialogue above:** Creon desires to bury Oedipus on the periphery of Thebes so as to avoid the pollution, yet he could honor Oedipus and offer rites at his tomb.]

[**Instructor's note:**In following passages here omitted, Ismenetells Oedipus of a **recent prophecy that previews the blessings Oedipus's burial will bring to Athens; that Theban invaders of Athens will some day be routed in a battle near the grave of Oedipus**.]

**OEDIPUS: And who told you what you’re telling me, child?**

**ISMENE: Envoys who visited the Delphic hearth.** [envoys=ambassadors; Delphi = oracle]

**OEDIPUS:**Hath Phoebus spoken thus concerning me?   [Apollo, through oracle]

**ISMENE:**So say the envoys who returned to Thebes.

**OEDIPUS:**And can a son of mine have heard of this?

**ISMENE:**Yea, both alike, and know its import well.

**OEDIPUS:**They knew it, yet the ignoble greed of rule  
Outweighed all longing for their sire's return.

**ISMENE:**Grievous thy words, yet I must own them true.            420

**OEDIPUS:**Then **may the gods never quench their fatal feud,  
And mine be the judgment of the fight,**                       
For which they now are arming, spear to spear;  
**That neither he who holds the scepter now**       [he = Eteocles] **May keep this throne, nor he who fled the realm**   [he = Polynices] **Return again.**

                         They never raised a hand,  
When I their sire was thrust from hearth and home,  
When I was banned and banished, what did they care?    
Say you this was done at my desire, a grace                 [this = Oedipus being banished]  
Which the state, yielding to my wish, allowed?                     430  
  
Not so; for, mark you, **on that very day**           [i.e., the day depicted in [*Oedipus the King*](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/texts/Tragedy/OedipusRex.htm)]  
**When in the tempest of my soul I craved  
Death, even death by stoning, none appeared  
To further that wild longing**, but later,         
When time had numbed my anguish and I felt  
My wrath had all outrun those errors past,  
Then, **then it was the city went about  
By force to oust me**, after delaying for years;

And **then my sons, who should as sons have helped,  
Did nothing**: and, one little word from them                         440  
Was all I needed, and **they spoke no word,  
But let me wander on for evermore,  
A banished man, a beggar.**   
                                                  These two maids        [two maids = Antigone & Ismene]  
Their sisters, girls, gave all their sex could give,  
Food and safe harborage and filial care;     [harborage = shelter; filial care = care of child for parent]  
While their two brethren sacrificed their sire  
For lust of power and sceptred sovereignty.      [sceptred sovereignty = right to rule]

No! me they ne'er shall win for an ally,                    [they = Eteocles & Polynices]  
Nor will this Theban kingship bring them gain;  
That I know from this maiden's oracles,                             450  
And those old prophecies concerning me,  
Which Phoebus now at length has brought to pass.

**Come Creon, then, come all the mightiest**  [Creon as another possible ruler of Thebes might also try to enlist Oedipus's help] **In Thebes to seek me**; for if ye my friends,               [my friends = chorus of Athenian elders]  
Championed by those dread Powers indigenous,    [indigenous = native; Powers = Furies?]  
Espouse my cause; then for the State ye gain  
A great deliverer, for my enemies a curse.

**CHORUS:**Our pity, Oedipus, you have to go,     
You and these maidens; and the stronger plea  
You urge, as the savior of our land,                                  460  
Disposes me to speak on behalf of your wellbeing.

**OEDIPUS:**Aid me, kind sirs; I will do all you bid.

**CHORUS:**First **make atonement to the deities**,              [deities = the Furies]  
Whose grove by trespass thou didst first profane.           [profane = violate]

**OEDIPUS:**After what manner, stranger? Teach me, pray.  [i.e., How to atone or appease the Furies]

**CHORUS:**Make a [**libation**](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/terms/L/libation.htm) first of water fetched                 [libation = offering]  
With undefiled hands from living spring.             [living spring = fresh source of water]

**OEDIPUS:**And after I have gotten this pure draught?        [draught = draft = portion]

**CHORUS:**Bowls thou wilt find, the carver's handiwork;  
Crown thou the rims and both the handles crown—                470

**OEDIPUS:**With olive shoots or blocks of wool, or how?

**CHORUS:**With wool from fleece of yearling freshly shorn. [yearling = year-old lamb]

**OEDIPUS:**What next? how must I end the **ritual**?

**CHORUS:**Pour thy libation, turning to the dawn. [libations were poured or shaken out to the earth as the gods’ portion]

**OEDIPUS:**Pouring it from the urns whereof ye spake?

**CHORUS:**Yea, in three streams; and be the last bowl drained  
To the last drop.

**OEDIPUS:**And wherewith shall I fill it,                 [wherewith = with what]  
Ere in its place I set it? This too tell.

**CHORUS:**With water and with honey; add no wine.

**OEDIPUS:**And when the embowered earth hath drunk thereof? [embowered=full of trees, referring to grove of Furies] 480

**CHORUS:**Then lay upon it thrice nine olive sprays    [thrice nine = 27]  
With both thy hands, and offer up this prayer.

**OEDIPUS:**I want to hear that prayer; that's most important.

**CHORUS:**That, as we call them Gracious, they would deign  [them = Furies; deign = think fit]  
To grant the petitioner their saving grace.                        
So pray thyself or whoso pray for thee,  
In whispered accents, not with lifted voice;                          [lifted voice = out loud]  
Then go and look back. Do as I bid,  
And I shall then be bold to stand thy friend;  
Else, stranger, I should have my fears for thee.                      490

**OEDIPUS:**Hear ye, my daughters, what these strangers say?

**ANTIGONE:**We listened, and attend thy bidding, father.

**OEDIPUS:**I cannot go, disabled as I am  
Doubly, by lack of strength and lack of sight;  
But one of you may do it in my stead;  
For one, I trust, may pay the sacrifice            
Of thousands, if his heart be loyal and true.            
So to your work with speed, but leave me not  
Untended; for this frame is all too weak  
To move without the help of guiding hand.                              500

**ISMENE:**Then **I will go perform these rites**, but where  
To find the spot, this have I yet to learn.

**CHORUS:**Beyond this grove; if thou hast need of anything,          [aught = anything]   
The guardian of the sanctuary will lend his aid.

**ISMENE:**I go, and you, Antigone, meanwhile  
Must guard our father. In a parent's cause  
Toil, if there be toil, is of no account.        [i.e., no end to a child’s debt and service to a parent]

***[Exit ISMENE]***

**http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/ximages/decor/strips/Rainbow_Thin.gif**

**[SCENE 4]**

**CHORUS:**(***Strophe 1) [Chorus moves left to right]***  
Ill it is, stranger, to awake  
Pain that long since has ceased to ache,  
And yet **I want to hear—**            510

**OEDIPUS:**What thing?

**CHORUS: Thy tale of cruel suffering**  
For which no cure was found,  
The fate that held thee bound.

**OEDIPUS:**O ask me not (as guest I claim  
This grace) to expose my shame.                               [[shame/honor](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/terms/H/honor.htm)]

**CHORUS:**The tale is reported far and near,      
And echoes still from ear to ear.  
The truth, I would like to hear.

**OEDIPUS:**Ah me!                                                   520

**CHORUS:**I pray thee consent to tell.

**OEDIPUS:**Ah me!

**CHORUS:**Grant my request, I granted all to thee.

**OEDIPUS: *(Antistrophe 1) [Chorus moves right to left]***  
Know then **I suffered ills most vile, but none  
(So help me Heaven!) from acts in malice done.**

**CHORUS:**Say how.

**OEDIPUS: The State around  
An all-unwitting bridegroom bound**[all-unwitting = naive, clueless] **An impious marriage chain**;  
That was my bane.                                                       [bane = curse]      530

**CHORUS: Didst thou in sooth then share**              [sooth = truth] **A bed incestuous with her that bare—**                          [her = Jocasta]

**OEDIPUS:**It stabs me like a sword,  
That two-edged word,  
O stranger, but **these maids—my own—**

**CHORUS:**Say on.

**OEDIPUS: Two daughters, curses twain.**         [curses twain = both products of incest]

**CHORUS:**Oh God!

**OEDIPUS: Sprang from the wife and mother's travail-pain.** [travail-pain= childbirth, labor]

**CHORUS: *(Strophe 2) [Chorus moves left to right]***  
What, **then thy offspring are at once—**                            540

**OEDIPUS: Too true.  
Their father's very sisters too.**

**CHORUS: Oh horror!**

**OEDIPUS:**Horrors from the boundless deep  
Back on my soul in choking surges sweep.

**CHORUS: Thou hast endured—**

**OEDIPUS: Intolerable woe.**

**CHORUS: And sinned—**

**OEDIPUS: I sinned not.**

**CHORUS:**How so?                                                      550

**OEDIPUS:**I served the State; would I had never won  
That graceless grace by which I was undone.

**CHORUS: *(Antistrophe 2) [Chorus moves right to left]***And next, unhappy man, **thou hast shed blood?**

**OEDIPUS:**Must ye hear more?

**CHORUS: A father's?**

**OEDIPUS:**Flood on flood  
Whelms me; that word's a second mortal blow.      [whelms = overwhelms]

**CHORUS:**Murderer!

**OEDIPUS:**Yes, a murderer, but know—

**CHORUS: What canst thou plead?**560

**OEDIPUS: A plea of justice.**

**CHORUS:**How?

**OEDIPUS: I slew him who otherwise would have me slain**;   
I slew without intent,  
A wretch, but **innocent  
In the law's eye**, I stand, without a stain.

**http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/ximages/decor/strips/Rainbow_Thin.gif**

**[SCENE 5]**

**CHORUS: Behold our sovereign, Theseus, Aegeus's son,**  
Comes at thy summons to perform his part.

***[Enter Theseus]***

**THESEUS: Oft had I heard of thee** in times gone by—               [thee = Oedipus]  
The bloody mutilation of thine eyes—                                [Oedipus’s self-blinding]        570  
And therefore know thee, son of Laius.               [know = recognize; son of Laius = Oedipus]

All that I lately gathered on the way                       [lately gathered = recently learned]  
Made my conjecture doubly sure; and now  
Thy garb and that marred visage prove to me  
That **thou art he**.   
                             So pitying thine estate,  
Most ill-starred Oedipus, I fain would know  
**What is the request you ask of me and Athens**,                        [suit = request]  
Thou and the helpless maiden at thy side.

Declare it; desperate indeed must be the tale       
Whereat I should recoil. **I too was reared,**580 **Like thee, in exile, and in foreign lands  
Wrestled with many perils, no man more.**  
Wherefore no alien in adversity                    [Therefore no traveler in distress . . . ]  
Shall seek in vain my succor, nor shalt thou;                   [succor = aid; thou = Oedipus]  
I know myself a mortal, and my share  
In what the morrow brings no more than thine.

**OEDIPUS:**Theseus, thy words so apt, so generous   
So comfortable, need no long reply   
Both who I am and of what lineage sprung,   
And from what land I came, thou hast declared.                        590  
So without prologue I may utter now   
**My brief petition**, and the tale is told.                     [petition = appeal]

**THESEUS:** Say on, and tell me what I fain would learn.               [fain would = would like to]

**OEDIPUS:****I come to offer thee this woe-worn frame,** [woe-worn frame = body near death]  
**A gift not fair to look on; yet its worth** **More precious far than any outward show.**

**THESEUS:** **What profit**dost thou proffer to have brought?    [What’s in it for me to inherit responsibility for your body in death?]

**OEDIPUS:****Hereafter you shall learn, not yet, methinks.**

**THESEUS:**When may we hope to reap the benefit?

**OEDIPUS:**When I am dead and you have buried me.              600

**THESEUS:****You crave life's last service; all before—**       [last service = final or funeral rites; all before = Oedipus's life story]  
**Is it forgotten** or of no account?                                       [it = Oedipus’s dishonored life]

**OEDIPUS:**Yea, the last boon is warrant for the rest.     [my death will redeem my life]

**THESEUS:**The grace you crave is then small indeed.

**OEDIPUS:**Nay, weigh it well; the issue is not slight.

**THESEUS:**You mean that between thy sons and me? [potential political strife b/w Thebes and Athens]

**OEDIPUS:**Prince, they wish to convey me back to Thebes.

**THESEUS:**If there be no compulsion, then methinks   
To rest in banishment befits not thee.

**OEDIPUS:**Nay, when I wished it they would not consent.          610

**THESEUS:**For shame! such temper isn't appropriate for fallen men. [given his backstory, Oedipus shouldn’t complain.]

**OEDIPUS:**Chide if you like, but first attend my plea.                [chide = scold]

**THESEUS:**Say on, **I wait full knowledge ere I judge.**

**OEDIPUS:**O Theseus,**I have suffered wrongs on wrongs.**

**THESEUS:**Wouldst tell the old misfortune of thy race?          [your family curse?]

**OEDIPUS:**No, that has grown a byword throughout Greece. [byword = commonplace proverb]

**THESEUS:**What then can this be beyond mortal grief?

**OEDIPUS:**My case stands thus; by my own flesh and blood   
I was expelled from my country, and can never   
There return again, a parricide.         [parricide = murderer of a parent]     620

**THESEUS:**Why fetch thee home if thou must needs obey?  
  
**OEDIPUS:**The Oracle has commanded them to do so. [them=Oedipus’s sons,+- Creon?]

**THESEUS:**What are they threatened by the oracle?    [What will they lose if they disobey the oracle?]

**OEDIPUS:**Destruction that awaits them in this land.

**THESEUS:**What can beget ill blood 'twixt them and me?

**OEDIPUS:**Dear son of Aegeus, **to the gods alone**          [son of Aegeus = Theseus]  
**Is given immunity from old age and death;**                               [eld = old age]  
**But nothing else escapes all-ruinous time.**   
Earth's might decays, the might of men decays,   
Honor grows cold, dishonor flourishes,                                      630  
There is no constancy 'twixt friend and friend,   
Or city and city; be it soon or late,   
Sweet turns to bitter, hate once more to love.

If now 'tis sunshine between Thebes and thee    [Thebes represented by Eteocles & Polynices; Athens by Theseus ("thee")]  
And not a cloud, Time in his endless course   
Gives birth to endless days and nights, wherein   
The merest nothing shall suffice to cut   
With serried spears your bonds of amity.                          [serried = toothed, serrated]  
Then shall my slumbering and buried corpse   
In its cold grave drink their warm life-blood up,                             640  
If Zeus be Zeus and Phoebus still speak true.

No more: 'tis ill to tear aside the veil                           ['tis ill = it's wrong]  
Of mysteries; let me cease as I began:   
Enough if you will keep thy solemn pledge,   
Then you shall never complain that Oedipus  
Proved an unprofitable and thankless guest,   
Except the gods themselves shall play me false.          [except = unless]

**CHORUS****:** **The man, my lord, has from the very first** **Declared his power to offer to our land** **These and like benefits.**                                                                    650

**THESEUS:**Who could reject   
The proffered amity of such a friend?                            [proffered = offered, extended]  
First, **he can claim the hospitality** **To which by mutual contract we stand pledged:**  
Next, coming here, a petitioner to the gods,   
He pays full tribute to the State and me;   
His favors therefore never will I spurn,   
But **grant him the full rights of citizen;**   
And, if it suits the stranger here to stay,     [stranger = Oedipus]  
I place him in your charge, or if he please  [your = chorus of elders']                    660  
Rather to come with me —choose, Oedipus,   
Which of the two thou wilt. Thy choice is mine.

**OEDIPUS:**Zeus, may thy blessing fall on men like these!

**THESEUS:**What dost thou then decide —to come with me?

**OEDIPUS:**Yea, were it lawful—but 'tis rather here—

**THESEUS:**What do you want here? I shall not thwart thy wish. [thwart = oppose]

**OEDIPUS:**Here shall I vanquish those who cast me forth.   [those=Oedipus’s sons,+- Creon?]

**THESEUS:**Then were thy presence here a boon indeed.    [boon = blessing]

**OEDIPUS:**Such shall it prove, if you fulfill your pledge.

**THESEUS:**Fear not for me; I shall not play thee false.                 670

**OEDIPUS:**No need to back thy promise with an oath.

**THESEUS:**An oath would be no surer than my word.

**OEDIPUS:**How will you act then?

**THESEUS:****What is it thou fearest?**

**OEDIPUS:****My enemies will come**—    [enemies = Creon, sons]

**THESEUS:**Our friends will look to that.

**OEDIPUS:**But if you leave me?

**THESEUS:**Teach me not my duty.

**OEDIPUS:**'Tis fear constrains me.                  [constrains = forces, compels]

**THESEUS:**My soul knows no fear!                                                      680

**OEDIPUS:**You know not what threats—

**THESEUS:**I know that **none** **Shall drag you away against my wishes**. Such threats    
Vented in anger oft, are blusters,   
An idle breath, forgot when sense returns.   
And for thy foemen, though their words were brave,        [foemen = enemies]  
Boasting to bring thee back, they are like to find   
The seas between us wide and hard to sail.   
Such is my firm purpose, but in any case   
Take heart, since Phoebus sent thee here. **My name,**    [Phoebus = Apollo (thru oracle)]    690  
**Though I be distant, protects thee from harm.**

**CHORUS:** ***strophe 1 [Chorus moves left to right]***Thou hast come to a steed-famed land for rest,     [Athens famous for its horses]  
O stranger worn with toil,   
To a land of all lands the goodliest   
Colonus's glistening soil.   
'Tis the haunt of the clear-voiced nightingale,   
Who hid in her bower, among   
The wine-dark ivy that wreathes the vale,   
Trilleth her ceaseless song;                                         [trilleth = warbles, sings]  
And she loves, where the clustering berries nod                  700  
O'er a sunless, windless glade,   
The spot by no mortal footstep trod,   
The pleasance kept for the Bacchic god,       [pleasance = pleasant place; Bacchic god =   
Where he holds each night his revels wild      [[Dionysus](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/terms/D/Dionysus.htm), god of wine & revelry]  
With the nymphs who fostered the lusty child.       [fostered = cared for; lusty child = Dionysus]  
  
***antistrophe******1 [Chorus moves right to left]***And fed each morn by the pearly dew   
The starred narcissi shine,                             [starred narcissi = sweet white flowers]  
And a wreath with the crocus's golden hue   
For the Mother and Daughter twine.               [Mother & Daughter = goddesses]  
And never the sleepless fountains cease                                710  
That feed Cephisus's stream,                         [Cephisus = river in Greece]  
But they swell earth's bosom with quick increase,   
And their wave hath a crystal gleam.   
And the Muses' quire will never disdain      [Muses = goddesses of the arts; quire = choir]  
To visit this heaven-favored plain,   
Nor the Cyprian queen of the golden rein.   [Cyprian queen = Aphrodite, Venus, goddess of love]  
  
***strophe******2 [Chorus moves left to right]***And here there grows, unpruned, untamed,   
Terror to enemy's spear,   
A tree in Asian soil unnamed,   
By Pelops' Dorian isle unclaimed, [Pelops=god of Pelopponesus region; Dorian= tribe of Greece]   720  
Self-nurtured year by year;   
'Tis the grey-leaved olive that feeds our boys;   
Nor youth nor withering age destroys   
The plant that the Olive Planter tends                     [Olive Planter = Zeus]  
And the Grey-eyed Goddess herself defends.        [Grey-eyed Goddess = Athena]  
  
***antistrophe******2 [Chorus moves right to left]***Yet another gift, of all gifts the most   
Prized by our fatherland, we boast —   
The might of the horse, the might of the sea;   
**Our fame, Poseidon, we owe to thee,**Son of Kronos, our king divine,    [Kronos=primeval god, father of sea-god Poseidon, a Titan]   730  
Who in these highways first didst fit   
For the mouth of horses the iron bit;   
Thou too hast taught us to fashion meet   
For the arm of the rower the oar-blade fleet,            [oar-blade fleet = sea galleys]  
Swift as the Nereids' hundred feet                            [Nereids = sea nymphs]  
As they dance along the brine.                                         [brine = sea water]

**http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/ximages/decor/strips/Rainbow_Thin.gif**

**[SCENE 6]**

**ANTIGONE:**Oh land extolled above all lands, 'tis now           [land = area of Athens]  
For thee to make these glorious titles good.      [Antigone sees Creon offstage]

**OEDIPUS:**Why this appeal, my daughter?

**ANTIGONE:**Father, lo! **Creon approaches** with his company.         740

**OEDIPUS:**Fear not, it shall be so; if we are old,   
This country's vigor has no touch of age.                    [this country = area of Athens]

***Enter CREON with attendants***

**CREON:**Citizens, noble friends, ye take alarm          
At my approach (I read it in your eyes),   
Fear nothing and refrain from angry words.   
I come with no ill purpose; I am old,   
And know the city to which I have come,           [the city = Athens]  
Without a peer amongst the powers of Greece.

It was by reason of my years that I   
Was chosen to persuade your guest and bring      [your guest = Oedipus]      750  
Him back to Thebes; not the delegate   
Of one man, but commissioned by the State,   
Since **of all Thebans I have most bewailed,** **Being his kinsman, his most grievous woes.** [Creon claims to have been on Oedipus's side all along]

O listen to me, luckless Oedipus,   
Come home! The whole Cadmeian people claim           [Cadmeian = Theban]  
With right to have thee back, I most of all,   
For most of all (else were I vile indeed)   
I mourn for thy misfortunes, seeing thee   
An aged outcast, wandering on and on,                                    760  
A beggar with one handmaid for thy support. 

Ah! who ever imagined **she** could fall                              [she = **Antigone**]  
To such a depth of misery as this,   
To tend in penury thy stricken frame,                               [penury = poverty]  
**A virgin ripe for wedlock, but unwed,**   
**A prey for any wanton ravisher?**                                   [ravisher = sexual predator]

Does it seem cruel, this reproach I cast   
On thee and on myself and all the race?   
Aye, but an open shame cannot be hid.                          [[shame/honor](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/terms/H/honor.htm)]  
Hide it, O hide it, Oedipus, thou canst.                                     770  
O, by our fathers' gods, consent I pray;   
**Come back to Thebes, come to thy father's home,**  
**Bid Athens, as is meet, a fond farewell;**Thebes thy old foster-mother claims thee first.

**OEDIPUS:**O front of brass, thy subtle tongue would twist      [front / brass=hypocritical face]  
To thy advantage every plea of right.  
Why try thy arts on me, why spread again                          [arts = rhetoric]  
Traps where it would wound me worst to be snared?              [toils = traps; gall = wound]

In old days when by self-wrought woes distraught,  [by self-wrought woes distraught = by self-inflicted problems distracted]   
I yearned for exile as a glad release,   [*Oedipus the King* ended with Oedipus being taken back into palace]    780  
Thy will refused the favor then I craved.   
But when my frenzied grief had spent its force,   
And I was fain to taste the sweets of home,                        [fain to = inclined to]  
Then you would thrust me from my country, **then** **These ties of kindred were by thee ignored;**  
And now again when you behold this State   
And all its kindly people welcome me,   
You seek to part us, wrapping in soft words   
Hard thoughts.

                           And yet **what pleasure can you****find**790 **In forcing friendship on unwilling foes?**  
Suppose a man refused to grant some boon   
When you importuned him, and afterwards                [importune = press urgently]  
When you had got your heart's desire, consented,   
Granting a grace from which all grace had fled,   
Would not such favor seem an empty boon?      [a late favor seems like no favor]

Yet such the boon you proffer now to me,              [boon = gift; proffer = offer, extend]  
Fair in appearance, but when tested false.   
Yea, I will prove thee false, that these may hear;                 [these = Chorus]  
**You have come to take me, not to take me home,**                           800  
**But plant me on thy borders, that thy State**   
**May so escape disturbance from this land.**          [Thebes may be protected from Athens]  
**That you shall never attain, but this instead—** **My ghost to haunt your country without end;**And for my sons, this heritage—no more—  
Just room to die in.   
                                  Have not I more skill   
Than you to see the future of Thebes?       
Are not my teachers surer guides than thine—  
Great Phoebus and the sire of Phoebus, Zeus?   
You are a corrupt messenger, thy tongue                          [suborned = corrupted]      810  
Is sharper than a sword's edge, yet thy speech   
Will bring thee more defeats than victories.   
However, I know I waste my words—begone,   
And leave me here; whatever may be my lot,   
He lives not ill who lives withal content.      [not ill = not badly; withal content = resigned to fate]

**CREON:**Who loses in this parley, I overthrown                    [parley = exchange]  
By you, or you who overthrow yourself?

**OEDIPUS:**I shall be well contented if thy suit             [suit = petition, request]  
Fails with these strangers, as it has with me.

**CREON:****Unhappy man, will years never make thee****wise?**             820  
Must you live on to cast a slur on age?

**OEDIPUS:**You have a glib tongue, but no honest man,      [glib = smooth, facile]  
Methinks, can argue well on every side.

**CREON:**It’s one thing to speak much, another to speak well.

**OEDIPUS:**Thy words, in truth, are few and all well aimed!

**CREON:**Not for a man indeed with wits like thine.

**OEDIPUS:**Depart! I bid thee in these citizens’ name,  
And prowl no longer round me to blockade   
My destined harbor.

**CREON:**I protest to these,            [these = chorus of citizens]               830  
Not thee, and for thine answer to thy kin,   
If ever I take thee—                                                [take thee = get my hands on you]

**OEDIPUS:**Who against their will could take me?

**CREON:****Though untaken you shall feel pain.**

**OEDIPUS:**What power do you have to execute this threat?

**CREON:****One of thy daughters is already seized,** **The other I will carry off soon.**

**OEDIPUS:**Woe, woe!

**CREON:**This is but prelude to thy woes.             [a foretaste of your pain]

**OEDIPUS:**Have you my child?             [Ismene]             840

**CREON:**And soon shall have the other.               [Antigone]

**OEDIPUS:**Ho, friends! surely ye will not play me false?    [friends = Chorus]  
Chase this ungodly villain from your land.

**CHORUS:**Hence, stranger, hence get out! Thou doest wrong     
In this, and wrong in all that thou hast done.

**CREON****(*to his guards*) :**It’s time to **carry off the girl by force,**   
If she refuses of her free will to go.

**ANTIGONE:**Ah, woe is me! where shall I fly, where find   
Succor from gods or men?                                                  [succor = relief]

**CHORUS:**What do you intend, stranger?         [stranger = Creon]         850

**CREON:**I meddle not with him, but her who is mine.

**OEDIPUS:**O princes of the land!

**CHORUS:****Sir, you do wrong.**

**CREON:**Nay, right.

**CHORUS:** How right?

**CREON:****I take but what is mine.**

**OEDIPUS:****Help, Athens!**

**CHORUS:** What means this, sir? **unhand her immediately,****or** **We must fight.**

**CREON:**Stand back!                                             860

**CHORUS:** Not till you forbear.                     [forbear = desist, back off]

**CREON:****It’s war with Thebes if I am touched or harmed.**

**OEDIPUS:**Didn’t I warn you?

**CHORUS:**Quick, unhand the maid!

**CREON:** Command your minions; I am not your slave.         [minions = troops]

**CHORUS:** Stop, I command thee.

**CREON*****(to the guard)* :** I command you to march!

**CHORUS:**To the rescue, one and all!   
Rally, neighbors to my call!   
See, the foe is at the gate!                               870  
Rally to defend the State.

**ANTIGONE:**Ah, woe is me, they drag me hence, O friends.      [hence = away]

**OEDIPUS:**Where are you, daughter?

**ANTIGONE:**Pulled along by force.

**OEDIPUS:**Thy hands, my child!

**ANTIGONE:**They will not let me, father.

**CREON:**Away with her!

**OEDIPUS:**Ah, woe is me, ah woe!

**CREON:**So those two crutches shall no longer serve you   [crutches=Oedipus’s daughters]  
For further roaming. Since it pleases you                      880  
To triumph over thy country and thy friends   
Whose mandate, though a prince, I here discharge,           [mandate = popular will]  
**Enjoy your triumph; sooner or later you’ll find** **You are an enemy to yourself,** both now   
And in time past, when in despite of friends   
**You gave yourself to passion, still thy curse.**

**CHORUS:**Hold there, sir stranger!

**CREON:**Hands off, take it easy.

**CHORUS:**Restore the maidens, or else you may not leave.

**CREON:**Then Thebes will take other hostages soon;                890  
I will lay hands on more than these two maids.

**CHORUS:**What canst thou further?

**CREON:**Carry off this man.

**CHORUS:**Brave words!

**CREON:**And deeds forthwith shall make them good.

**CHORUS:**Unless perchance our sovereign intervene.    [our sovereign = Theseus]

**OEDIPUS:**O shameless voice! Dare you lay a hand on me?

**CREON:**Silence, I bid thee!

**OEDIPUS:****Goddesses, allow**                         [Goddesses = Furies of the sacred grove]  
**Thy suppliant to utter yet one curse!**              [suppliant = petitioner]         900  
Wretch, now my eyes are gone thou hast torn away   
The helpless maiden who was eyes to me;   
For these **to thee and all thy cursed race** **May the great Sun, whose eye is everywhere,** **Grant length of days and old age like to mine.**    [curse predicts Creon’s fate in *Antigone*]

**CREON:**Listen, O men of Athens, do you hear this?

**OEDIPUS:**They hear us both and understand that I,   
Wronged by your deeds, defend myself with words.

**CREON:**Nothing shall curb my will; though I be old   
And single-handed, I will have this man.                           910

**OEDIPUS:**O woe is me!

**CHORUS:**Thou art a bold man, stranger, if thou think'st   
To execute thy purpose.

**CREON:**So I do.

**CHORUS:**Then shall Athens no longer be Athens.

**CREON:**With a just quarrel weakness conquers might.

**OEDIPUS:**Do you hear his words?

**CHORUS:**Aye words, but not yet deeds,   
Zeus knoweth!

**CREON:** Zeus may chance to know, not thou.    920

**CHORUS:** **Insolence!**

**CREON:**Insolence you must bear.

**http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/ximages/decor/strips/Rainbow_Thin.gif**

**[SCENE 7]**

**CHORUS:**Haste ye princes, sound the alarm!   
Men of Athens, to arms! to arms!  
Quickly to the rescue come   
Ere the robbers get them home.

***[Enter THESEUS]***

**THESEUS:**Why this outcry? What is happening? Why was I called away   [wherefore? = why?]  
From the altar of Poseidon, lord of your Colonus? Say!   
On what errand have I hurried here without stop or delay?

**OEDIPUS:**Dear friend—your accents tell me who you are—            930  
That man has just now done me a foul wrong.                           [that man = Creon]

**THESEUS:**What is this wrong and who hath wrought it? Speak.

**OEDIPUS:****Creon, who stands before thee.** He it is   
Who robbed me of my all, my two daughters.

**THESEUS:**What does this mean?

**OEDIPUS:**You have heard my tale of wrongs.

**THESEUS:**Ho! hasten to the altars, one of you.   
Command my soldiers to leave the sacrifice          [sacrifice: i.e., at nearby altar of Poseidon]  
And hurry, foot and horse, with rein unchecked,              [foot & horse = infantry & cavalry]  
To where the paths that porters use diverge,     [porters = cargo-carriers]    940  
Lest the two maidens slip away, and I   
Become a mockery to this my guest,   
As one deprived by force.

                                              Quick, as I bid.   
As for this stranger, had I let my rage,                           [this stranger = Creon]  
Justly provoked, have play, he would not escape   
Unharmed and uncorrected at my hands.

But **now the laws to which himself appealed,**                            [himself = Creon]  
**These and none others shall apply.**              [these = laws]  
Thou shalt not quit this land, till thou hast fetched          [thou = Creon]     950  
The maidens and produced them in my sight.

Thou hast offended both against myself                              [Thou = Creon]  
And thine own race and country. Having come   
Unto **a State that champions right and asks**        [a State that champions right = Athens]  
**For every action warranty of law,**   
Thou hast set aside the custom of the land,   
And like some freebooter you carry off             [freebooter = pirate]  
What plunder pleases thee, as if forsooth   
You thought this a city without men,   
Or manned by slaves, and their king a nobody.                960  
  
But you didn’t learn this villainy from Thebes;   
Thebes is not wont to breed unrighteous sons,   
Nor would she praise you, if she learned that you   
Were robbing me—aye, and the gods to boot,   
Taking by force their suppliants, poor maids.             [suppliants = Antigone & Ismene as persons seeking protection]

Were I on Theban soil\*, to prosecute   
The justest claim imaginable, I   
Would never wrest by violence my own   
Without sanction of your State or King;   
I should behave as fits an outsider                                       970  
Living amongst a foreign folk, but you   
Shame a city that deserves it not,                                [[shame/honor](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/terms/H/honor.htm)]  
Even your own, and plentitude of years                          [plentitude = plenitude, fullness]  
Have made of you an old man and a fool.

[\***Instructor's note:** Theseus chides Creon by saying that if Theseus were visiting Creon's Theban territories, he would never take military action without consulting with the leaders of Thebes. Beginning at line 982 below, Creon tries to turn the argument by saying he couldn't imagine that Theseus would object to actions taken against a moral outcast like Oedipus.]

Therefore again I charge you as before,   
See that the maidens are restored at once,   
Unless you would continue here by force   
And not by choice a sojourner; so much         [sojourner = a visitor who may leave at will]  
I tell you straight, and what I say I mean.

**CHORUS:** Thy case is perilous; **though by birth and****race**980 **Thou should be just, plainly thou doest wrong.**

**CREON:**Not deeming this city void of men   
Or counsel, son of Aegeus, as you say            [son of Aegeus = Theseus]   
I did what I have done; rather I thought   
Your people were not like to set such store   
by kin of mine and keep them against my will.

Nor would they harbor, so I stood assured,   
**A godless parricide, a reprobate**           [parricide = parent-murderer; reprobate = troublemaker—i.e., Oedipus]  
**Convicted of incestuous marriage ties.**   
For on her native hill of Ares here    [hill of Ares=Mars Hill, where Paul later preached; [Acts 17.16-34](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/xcritsource/classical/Areopagus.htm)]  990  
(I knew your far-famed [Areopagus](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/xcritsource/classical/Areopagus.htm))                  [[Areopagus](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/xcritsource/classical/Areopagus.htm) = chief homicide court of Athens; setting of conclusion of *The Eumenides*]      
Sits Justice, and permits not vagrant folk   
To stay within your borders.   
                                               In that faith   
I hunted down my quarry; and even then  
I had refrained but for the curses dire   
With which he scourged my kinsfolk and myself:             [he = Oedipus]  
Such wrong, methought, justified my act.

Anger has no old age but only death;   
The dead alone can feel no touch of spite.                             1100  
So thou must work thy will; my cause is just   
But weak without allies; yet will I try,   
Old as I am, to answer deeds with deeds.

**OEDIPUS:****O shameless big-mouth, do you think this abuse** **Defames my grey hairs—rather than your own?**   
**Murder and incest, deeds of horror, all** **You blurt forth against me, all I have borne,** **No willing sinner; so it pleased the gods**,  
Since you could find no sin in me myself   
For which in retribution I was doomed                                   1110  
To trespass thus against myself and mine.

Answer me now, if by some oracle   
My sire was destined to a bloody end   
By a son's hand, **can this reflect on me,** **Me then unborn, begotten by no sire,** **Conceived in no mother's womb?**  
                                                               **And if** **When born to misery, as born I was,** **I met my sire, not knowing whom I met or what I did,**

**and slew him,****how can you****With justice blame my all-unconscious hand?**                 1120

**And for my mother, wretch, be ashamed,** **As she was your sister**, to extort        [true to tragedy's moral complexity, Oedipus here shares guilt with Creon]  
From me the story of her marriage, such   
A marriage as I straightway will proclaim.   
For I will speak. **Thy lewd and impious speech** **Has broken all the bonds of reticence.**

**She was, ah woe is me! she was my mother;** **I knew it not, nor she**; and she my mother   
Bare children to the son whom she had borne,   
A birth of shame. But this at least I know:               [[shame/honor](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/terms/H/honor.htm)]       1130  
**Knowingly you vilify her and me;** **But I unknowingly wed, and unwilling speak.**

Nay, neither in this marriage or this deed   
That you are ever throwing in my face—  
A murdered father—shall I be held to blame.   
Come, answer me one question, if thou canst:   
If one should presently attempt to kill you,   
**Would you, O man of justice, first inquire** **If the assassin was by chance thy father,** **Or turn on him?** If you love your life,                                                      1140  
On your aggressor you would turn, nor stand   
Debating if the law would justify.

Such was my case, and such the pass whereto                [pass = situation]  
The gods reduced me; and **I think my father,** **Could he come back to life, would not dissent.**   
But you who are not just, but a man   
Who stops at nothing if it serve your case,   
Reproach me with this before these men.

It serves your purpose to praise great Theseus's name,   
And Athens as a wisely governed State;                                   1150  
Yet in thy flatteries one thing is missing:   
**If any land knows how to pay the gods** **Their proper rites, it is Athens above all.**  
This is the land where you wanted to steal   
Their aged suppliant and carried off   
My daughters. Therefore to yon goddesses,                       [yon goddesses = the Furies]  
I turn, adjure them and invoke their aid                             [adjure = entreat]  
To champion my cause, that you may learn   
What is the breed of men who guard this State.

**CHORUS:**An honest man, my liege, one sorely tested    [man = Oedipus; liege = lord; i.e., Theseus]        1160  
By fortune, and so worthy our support.

**THESEUS:**Enough of words; the captors journey amain,  [captors; i.e. of Antigone & Ismene; amain = at full speed]  
While we the victims stand debating here.

**CREON:**What do you want? What can I ever do?

**THESEUS:****Show us the trail**, and I'll attend thee too,   
That, if thou hast the maidens hereabouts,   
Thou mayest thyself discover them to me;   
But if thy guards outrun us with their captives,                       
We may slow down; for others speed, from whom         
They will not escape to thank the gods at home.           [they = captors]      1170

Lead on, I say, **the captor's caught, and fate** **Hath taken the hunter in the traps he set;**           
So soon lost are gains gotten by deceit.   
And look not for allies; I know indeed   
Such height of insolence was never reached   
Without abettors or accomplices;   
Thou hast some backer in thy bold attempt,                   
But I will search this matter home and see   
**One man doth not prevail against the State.**  [i.e., Greece as democracy governed by laws]  
Dost take my drift, or seem these words as vain                              1180  
As seemed our warnings when the plot was hatched?

**CREON:**Nothing thou sayest can I here dispute,   
But once at home I too shall act my part.

**THESEUS:**Threaten us and—begone! Thou, Oedipus,   
Stay here assured that nothing save my death   
Will deter my purpose to restore the maids.

**OEDIPUS:**Heaven bless thee, Theseus, for thy nobleness   
And all thy loving care in my behalf.

***[Exeunt Theseus  and Creon]***

**[Instructor's note:**In passages below, recall that **the chorus is moving**, potentially imparting a sense of the action the chorus describes.**]**

**CHORUS: *strophe 1 [Chorus moves left to right]***O when the flying foe,   
Turning at last to bay,                                                                   1190  
Will soon give blow for blow,   
**I would like to see that fight;**                   [sorry, no [spectacle](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/terms/S/spectacle.htm), please]  
To hear the roar of battle    
Swell on the Pythian shore                       [Pythian = at Delphi]  
Or by the torch-lit bay,   
Where the dread **Queen and Maid\***      
Cherish the mystic rites\*,                    [rites = Eleusinian Mysteries]  
Rites they to none betray,                  [they = Queen and Maid, leaders of Eleusinian Mysteries]        
Ere on his lips is laid                          [ere = before; his = the initiate’s]  
Secrecy's golden key                                                                                                1200  
By their own acolytes,                        [acolytes = assistants]  
Priestly Eumolpidae.          [Eumolpidae = family of priests for Eleusinian Mysteries]

[**\*Queen and Maid**, leaders of Eleusinian Mysteries, rituals preparing initiates for afterlife]  
  
There I might chance **behold** **Theseus, our captain bold,** **Confront the robber band,** **Ere they have fled the land,** **Rescue by might and main** [might & main = greatest possible strength]  **Maidens, the captives twain.**  
  
***antistrophe******1 [Chorus moves right to left]***Perhaps on swiftest steed,   
Or in the flying chariot,                                                    1210  
Now they approach the glen . . .   [they=Theseus’s soldiers; glen = secluded narrow valley]  
They will be vanquished:   
**Fearsome are our warriors, dangerous**         [dread = fear-inspiring]  
**Theseus our chieftain's men.** **Flashes each bridle bright,** **Charges each gallant knight,**  
All that our Queen adore,   
Pallas their patron, or                      [Pallas = Athena, Athens’s patron goddess]  
Him whose wide floods enring   
Earth, the great Ocean-king            [Ocean-king = Poseidon]             1220  
Whom Rhea bore.                            [Rhea = Titan, mother of Poseidon (sired by Cronos)]  
  
***strophe 2 [Chorus moves left to right]*****Fight they or now prepare** **To fight? a vision rare** **Tells me** that soon again   
I shall behold the twain                         [twain = two]  
Maidens so ill bestead,                         [bestead = treated]  
By their kin buffeted.                             [their kin = Creon; buffeted = battered]  
Today, today Zeus grants us some great thing   
This day shall victory bring.   
O for the wings, the wings of a dove,                                 1230  
To be borne with the speed of the gale,                  [gale = storm-wind]   
Up and still upwards to sail   
And gaze on the fray from the clouds above.               [fray = battle]   
  
***antistrophe******2 [Chorus moves right to left]***All-seeing Zeus, O lord of heaven,   
To our guardian host be given                          [our guardian host = Theseus’s troops]  
Might triumphant to surprise   
Flying foes and win their prize.   
Hear us, Zeus, and hear us, child   
Of Zeus, Athena undefiled,   
Hear, Apollo, hunter, hear,                                                     1240  
Huntress, sister of Apollo,                                       [huntress sister = Artemis]  
Who the dappled swift-foot deer   
Through the wooded glade dost follow;   
Help with your two-fold power   
Athens in danger's hour!   
O wayfarer, thou wilt not have to tax   
The friends who watch for thee with false presage,         [presage = vision]  
For **lo, an escort with the maids draws near.**     [escort = body of armed men]

**http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/ximages/decor/strips/Rainbow_Thin.gif**

**[SCENE 8]**

***Enter Antigone and Ismene with Theseus***  
**OEDIPUS:**Where, where? what are you telling me?      [Where? . . . i.e., Where are my daughters?]

**ANTIGONE:**O father, father,                                                 1250  
Would that some god might grant thee eyes to see   
This best of men who brings us back again.               [This best of men = Theseus as hero of [romance](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/terms/R/romance.htm) narrative]

**OEDIPUS:**My child! and are ye back indeed!

**ANTIGONE:**Yes, **saved** By Theseus and his gallant followers.     [reminiscent of [romance](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/terms/R/romance.htm) narrative]

**OEDIPUS:**Come to **your father's arms**, O let me feel   
**A child's embrace** I never hoped for more.

**ANTIGONE:**Thou askest what is **doubly sweet** to give.       [[sentimentality](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/terms/S/sentiment.htm)?]

**OEDIPUS:**Where are ye then?

**ANTIGONE:**We come together both.

**OEDIPUS:**My precious nurslings!            [nurslings = babies]                     1260

**ANTIGONE:**Fathers are always silly.

**OEDIPUS:**Props of my age!

**ANTIGONE:**So sorrow sorrow props.        [misery loves company]

**OEDIPUS:**I have my darlings, and if death should come,   
Death were not wholly bitter with you near.   
Cling to me, press me close on either side,   
There rest ye from your dreary wayfaring.   
**Now tell me of your adventures, but in brief;** **Brief speech suffices for young maids like you.**

**ANTIGONE:**Here is **our savior**; you should hear the tale  [our savior = Theseus; compare [romance](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/terms/R/romance.htm) protagonist; e.g. knight, superhero]  1270  
From his own lips; so shall my part be brief.

**OEDIPUS:**I pray thee do not wonder if the sight                 [wonder = marvel]  
Of children, given up for lost, has made  
My speech somewhat long and tedious.

Full well I know the joy I have of them             [them = Antigone, Ismene]  
Is due to you, to you and no man else;            [you = Theseus]  
**You were their sole deliverer, none else.  
The gods deal with you after my desire,  
With you and with this land!** for fear of heaven   [this land: Oedipus implies further blessings on Athens]  
I found above all peoples most with you,                                      1280  
And righteousness and lips that cannot lie.

I speak in gratitude of what I know,  
For all I have I owe to thee alone.  
Give me your hand, O Prince, that I may touch it,     [Prince = Theseus]  
And if thou wilt permit me, kiss your cheek.

What say I? Can I wish that you should touch  
One fallen like me to utter wretchedness,  
**Corrupt and tainted** with a thousand ills?  
Oh no, I would not let you if you would.  
Only those who have known calamity                                        1290  
Can share it.  Let me greet you where you are,  
And still befriend me as thou hast till now.

**THESEUS:**I marvel not if thou hast dallied long  
In converse with thy children and preferred                 [converse = conversation]  
Their speech to mine; I feel no jealousy,  
I would be famous more by deeds than words.             [Theseus behaves as gallant hero of [romance](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/terms/R/romance.htm) narrative]

Of this, old friend, thou hast had proof; my oath  
I have fulfilled and brought thee back the maids  
Alive and nothing harmed for all those threats.  
And **how the fight was won, it would waste words**1300 **To boast**—thy daughters here will tell thee all.

**But of a matter that has just occurred  
On my way back, I would like to have  
Thy counsel**—trivial it might seem, yet worthy of thought.  
A wise man heeds all matters great or small.

**OEDIPUS:**What is it, son of Aegeus?  Let me hear.  
Of what you’re asking I know nothing.

**THESEUS:**It is said **a man, no countryman of thine,**     [a man = Polynices, Oed's son] **But of thy kin, hath taken sanctuary  
Beside the altar of Poseidon**, where                                         1310  
I was at sacrifice when called away.

**OEDIPUS:**What is his country? what the suitor's prayer?

**THESEUS:**I know but one thing; **he implores, I am told,  
A word with thee**—he will not trouble thee.

**OEDIPUS:**What does he seek?   
If he is a suppliant, his need is grave. [suppliant = grave=serious]

**THESEUS:**He only waits, they say, to speak with thee,  
And then unharmed to go upon his way.

**OEDIPUS:**I wonder who this petitioner can be.

**THESEUS:**Think if there be not any of thy kin                              1320  
At Argos who might claim this boon of thee.        ["Argos" clues that the suppliant is Polynices, who married a princess of Argos to help recruit the "Seven Against Thebes"]

**OEDIPUS:**Dear friend, forbear, I pray.                 [forbear = hold off]

**THESEUS:**What ails thee now?

**OEDIPUS:**Ask it not of me.

**THESEUS:** Ask not what? explain.

**OEDIPUS:**Thy words have told me who the suppliant is.            [suppliant = petitioner]

**THESEUS:**Who can he be that I should frown on him?

**OEDIPUS: My son, O king, my hateful son**, whose words               [My son = Polynices]  
Of all men's most would jar upon my ears.               [jar upon = irritate]

**THESEUS: Surely you might listen.**  If his suit offend,                     1330  
No need to grant it.  Why so loath to hear him?          [loath = reluctant]

**OEDIPUS:**That voice, O king, grates on a father's ears;  
I have come to hate it.  Force me not to yield.

**THESEUS:**But he hath found asylum.  O beware,  
And **fail not in due reverence to the god.**

**[Instructor's note:** In speech below, Antigone foreshadows her actions on Polynices's behalf in *Antigone*(written also by Sophocles app. 50 years earlier*).*]

**ANTIGONE:**O heed me, father, though I am young in years.  
Let the prince have his will; you should pay   
What in his eyes is service to the god;  
For our sake also let our brother come.             [our = his sisters']

If what he urges tend not to the good                                     1340  
He surely cannot make you obey him.  
To hear him then, what harm?  By open words  
A scheme of villainy is soon betrayed.

**Thou art his father—you cannot repay  
In kind a son's most impious outrages.**  
O listen to him; **other men like thee  
Have thankless children** and are angry,        
But yielding to persuasion's gentle spell  
They let their savage mood be exorcised.                 [exorcised = cast out]

**Look thou to the past, forget the present, think**                      1350  
**On all the woe thy sire and mother brought thee;**There you will **draw this lesso**n without fail:  
**Of evil passion, evil is the end.**Thou hast, alas, to prick thy memory,  
Stern monitors, your ever-sightless eyes.             
O yield to us; just suitors should not need            [suitors = claimants, petitioners]  
To be importunate, **nor he that takes**                   [importunate = nagging]  
**A favor lack the grace to make return.**   [As wrong begets wrong, so kindness may beget grace; Antigone pleads to example of Theseus's favor toward Oedipus, which Oedipus should pass on to Polynices]

**OEDIPUS:**Grievous to me, my child, the gift you win  
By pleading.  **Let it be, then; have your way**                            1360  
Only if come he must, I beg thee, friend,  
Let none have power to dispose of me.

**THESEUS:**No need, Sir, to appeal a second time.  
I do not like to boast, but be assured  
**Thy life is safe while any god saves mine.**

***[Exit Theseus]***

**CHORUS: (Strophe) *[Chorus moves left to right]***

Who craves excess of days,  
          Scorning the common span  
          Of life, I judge that man  
A foolish man who walks in folly's ways.

For **the long years heap up a grievous load,**                    1370  
          Scant pleasures, heavier pains,  
          Till not one joy remains  
For him who lingers on life's weary road

     And come it slow or fast,  
          One doom of fate  
          Doth all await,  
          For dance and marriage bell,  
          The dirge and funeral knell.  
Death the deliverer frees all at last.

***(Antistrophe) [Chorus moves right to left]***

**Not to be born at all**                                                 1380  
          I**s best, far best that can befall,  
          Next best, when born, with least delay  
          To trace the backward way.**

**For when youth passes with its giddy train,  
     Troubles on troubles follow, toils on toils,  
          Pain, pain forever pain;**  
          And none escapes life's coils.          [coils = hard turns, painful twists]

          Envy, sedition, strife,  
Carnage and war, make up the tale of life.  
Last comes the worst and most abhorred stage              1390  
          Of unregarded age,  
Joyless, companionless and slow,  
          Of woes the crowning woe.

***(***[***Epode***](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/terms/E/epode.htm)***) (chorus stands still)***

**Such ills not I alone,  
He too our guest hath known**,                                      [he = Oedipus]  
Just like some headland on an iron-bound shore,  
Lashed by the wintry blasts and surge's roar,  
So is he buffeted on every side  
By drear misfortune's whelming tide,  
          By every wind of heaven overcome                          1400  
          Some from the sunset, some from eastern morn,   
          Some from the noonday glow.  
Some from the northern gloom of everlasting snow.

[The honest fear and pity of the Choral Ode above may be an instance of [Catharsis](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/terms/C/catharsis.htm) in which facing pain helps relieve pain.]

**http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/ximages/decor/strips/Rainbow_Thin.gif**

**[SCENE 9]**

[**Instructor's note:**The following scene of Oedipus's repudiation of Polynices might be compared / contrasted to Christ's [Parable of the Prodigal Son, Luke 15: 11-32](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/texts/bible/Lk15ProdSon.htm)]

**ANTIGONE:**Father, methinks **I see the stranger coming**,                    [stranger = Polynices]  
Alone he comes and weeping plenteous tears.

**OEDIPUS:**Who may he be?

**ANTIGONE:**   The same we surmised.  
From the outset—Polynices.  He is here.

***[Enter Polynices]***

**POLYNICES:**Ah me, my sisters, shall I first lament  
My own afflictions, or my aged sire's,                                 1410  
Whom here I find a castaway, with you,  
In a strange land, an ancient beggar clad  
In tattered rags, disfiguring all his frame,                  
While over his sightless eyes his unkempt hair       
Floats in the breeze; and, as it were to match,  
He carries a bag of food-scraps against hunger's pinch.

**All this too late I learn**, wretch that I am,  
Alas! I own it, and am proved most vile  
In my neglect of you: **I scorn myself.**  
But as almighty Zeus in all he doth                                      1420  
Hath Mercy for co-partner of this throne,         [Zeus as god of justice + mercy]  
**Let Mercy, father, also sit enthroned  
In thy heart likewise.  For transgressions past  
May be amended, cannot be made worse.**

**Why silent? Father, speak. Don’t turn away,  
Have you no word?** Will you dismiss me then  
In mute disdain, nor tell me why you are wroth?           [wroth = angry]  
O ye his daughters, sisters mine, will you try  
To change his sullen, obstinate silence?  
Let him not spurn, without a single word                             1430  
Of answer, me the petitioner of the god.         [referring to Polynices's recent visit to altar of Poseidon]

**ANTIGONE:**Tell him yourself, unhappy one, your purpose;  
For large discourse may send a thrill of joy,  
Or stir a chord of wrath or tenderness,  
And to the tongue-tied somehow give a tongue.

**POLYNICES:**You counsel me well, and I will speak out.  
First will I call in aid the god himself,  
Poseidon, from whose altar I was called,  
With warrant from the monarch of this land,            [monarch = Theseus]  
To speak with you, and depart unharmed.                         1440  
These pledges, strangers, I would see observed  
By you and by my sisters and my sire.

Now, father, let me tell you why I came.  
**I have been banished from my native land**  
**Because by right of primogeniture**     [primogeniture = first-born son inherits all]  
**I claimed possession of thy sovereign throne  
From which Eteocles, my younger brother,  
Ousted me**, not by weight of precedent,  
Nor by the last arbitrament of war,  
But by his popular acts; and **the prime cause**     [popular = populist; mob-pleasing]   1450  
**Of this I deem the curse that rests on thee.**  [Polynices resists responsibility, flips cause to family curse]

So likewise hold the soothsayers, for when          [soothsayers = oracles, augurers like Tiresias]  
I came to **Argos** in the Dorian land                                  [Argos, also site of*Agamemnon*]  
And took the king Adrastus's child to wife,  
**Under my standard I enlisted all  
The foremost captains of that land,  
To levy with their aid that sevenfold host  
Of spearmen against Thebes**, determining     [> [the "Seven Against Thebes"](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/texts/Tragedy/SevenXThebes.htm)]  
To oust my foes or die in a just cause.

Why then, you ask, am I here today?                     1460  
Father, I come a **petitioner to thee  
Both for myself and my allies who now  
With seven squadrons beneath their seven spears  
Occupy all the plain that circles Thebes. . . .**

[**Instructor's note:**In passages omitted here, Polynices names and praises each of the other six captains]

Last I thy son, or thine at least in name,                  [Last = i.e., last of the Seven Against Thebes]  
If but the bastard of an evil fate,  
Lead against Thebes the fearless Argive host.

Thus by thy children and thy life, my sire,  
We all implore thee to remit thy wrath                                      [remit = give up]   
And favor one who seeks a just revenge                                           1470  
Against a brother who has banned and robbed him.  [cf. Cain & Abel, Jacob & Esau, [Prodigal Son](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/texts/bible/Lk15ProdSon.htm), Claudius & King Hamlet in *Hamlet*]

**For victory, if oracles speak true,  
Will fall to those who have you for their ally.**  
So, by our fountains and familiar gods  
I pray thee, yield and hear; a beggar I  
And exile, thou an exile likewise; both  
Involved in one misfortune find a home  
As pensioners, while he, the lord of Thebes,     [he, lord of Thebes = Eteocles, Polynices’s younger brother]  
O agony! makes a mock of thee and me.

I'll scatter with a breath the upstart's might,      [upstart = Eteocles]1480  
And **bring thee home again and establish thee**, [establish thee = put Oedipus on throne]  
And establish, having cast him out, myself.                [him = Eteocles]  
This with thy goodwill I will undertake,  
Without it I can scarce return alive.

**CHORUS:**For the king's sake who sent him, Oedipus,        [king = Theseus]  
Dismiss him not without an appropriate reply.

**OEDIPUS:**Nay, worthy elders, except for Theseus's sake  
Who sent him here to have word with me.  
Never again would he have heard my voice;  
But now he shall obtain this parting grace,         [[irony]](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/terms/I/irony.htm)                         1490  
An answer that will bring him little joy.                    [him = Polynices]

**O villain, when you had the sovereignty** [villain = Polynices] **That now your brother holds in thy stead,  
Did you not drive me, your own father, out,**  
An exile, cityless, and make we wear  
This beggar's garb you now weep to behold,  
**Now you are come to pity my sad plight?**

**Nothing is here for tears; it must be borne  
By *me* till death, and I shall think of you  
As of my murderer**; you did thrust me out;                           1500  
It was **you who made me conversant with woe,  
Through you I beg my bread in a strange land;**  
And had not these my daughters tended me  
I had been dead for aught of aid from thee.

They tend me, they preserve me, **they are men  
Not women in true service to their father;  
But you are bastards, no sons of mine.**  
**Therefore the justice of Heaven watches thee;**  
Though not yet with aspect so severe  
As you shall soon experience, if indeed                                  1510  
These banded hosts are moving against Thebes.         [banded hosts = gathered armies]

**That city you can never storm, but first  
You and your brother shall fall**, blood-imbrued.              [imbrued = stained]  
Such curse I lately launched against you twain,  
**Such curse I now invoke** to fight for me,  
**That you might learn to honor those who bear thee**  
Nor flout a sightless father who begat  
Degenerate sons—these maidens did not so.

Therefore my curse is stronger than thy "throne,"  
Thy "suppliance," if by right of laws eternal         [justice over mercy]      1520  
Primeval Justice sits enthroned with Zeus.  
**Begone, abhorred, disowned, no son of mine,  
Thou vilest of the vile! and take with thee  
This curse I leave thee as my last bequest:—**  
**Never to win by arms thy native land,  
No, nor return to Argos in the Vale,  
But by a kinsman's hand to die and slay  
Him who expelled thee.**                                        [him = Eteocles]

                                            So I pray and call  
On the ancestral gloom of Tartarus                                     [Tartarus = Hell]  
To snatch thee hence, on these dread goddesses     [dread goddesses = Furies]       1530  
I call, and Ares who incensed you both                   [Ares = god of war; cf. Mars]  
To mortal enmity.  Go now proclaim  
What thou hast heard to the Cadmeians all,                    [Cadmeians = Thebans]  
Thy staunch confederates—**this the heritage  
that Oedipus divideth to his sons.**

**Oedipus's cursing of Polynices**

(For style-comparison of these two paintings, see [Expressionism](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/terms/E/expressionism.htm))

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/ximages/Tragedy/thebanplays/OedipusBaschet%5b1%5d.jpg | http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/ximages/Tragedy/thebanplays/Oedipus_Cursing_His_Son_PolynicesHenryFuseli%5b1%5d.jpg |
| **Oedipus (with Ismene and Antigone)  condemns Polynices by Andre-Marcel Baschet, 1883** | **Oedipus Cursing his Son, Polynices By Henry Fuseli, 1741-1825** |

**CHORUS:**Thy mission, Polynices, failed to impress us  
From the start; now leave us with haste.

**Polynices:**Woe worth my journey and my baffled hopes!  
Woe worth my comrades!  What a desperate end  
To that glad march from Argos!  Woe is me!                              1540

**I dare not whisper this curse to my allies  
Or turn them back, but mute must meet my doom.**  
**My sisters**, his daughters, you have heard  
The prayers of our stern father. If his curse  
Should come to pass and someday you return  
To Thebes, O then disown me not, I pray,  
But **grant me burial and due funeral rites\*.**         
So shall the praise your filial care now wins             [filial care = daughter Antigone's care for father Oedipus]  
Be doubled for the service wrought for me.

**[\*Polynices’s request previews *Antigone*, the play whose action concludes Sophocles’s Theban Trilogy.]**

**ANTIGONE:**One boon, O Polynices, let me crave.                1550

**Polynices:**What is it, dear Antigone? Do speak.

**ANTIGONE: Turn back thy host to Argos with all speed,  
And ruin not thyself and Thebes as well.**

**Polynices: That cannot be.  How could I lead again  
An army that had seen their leader quail?**

**ANTIGONE: But, brother, why should you be wish to fight again?  
What profit comes from thy country's ruin?**

**Polynices:**To live in exile is shameful, and shalI                   [[shame/honor](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/terms/H/honor.htm)]  
an elder brother bear a younger brother's insults?

**ANTIGONE:**Will you then bring to pass his prophecies                  1560  
Who threatens mutual slaughter to you both?

**Polynices:**Aye, so he wishes:—but **I cannot yield**.  [compare Agamemnon's dilemma either to sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia or lose the Trojan War]

**ANTIGONE:**O woe is me! but wait. Will any who  
Hear his prophecy dare to follow thee?

**Polynices:**I shall not tell it; a good general  
Reports successes and conceals mishaps.

**ANTIGONE:**Misguided youth, your purpose then stands fast!

**Polynices:**'Tis so. Don’t stop me. **The road I choose,  
Haunted by my father and his avenging spirit,  
Leads me to ruin; but for you may Zeus**1570 **Make your path bright if ye fulfill my request  
When dead; in life ye cannot serve me more.\***

Now let me go, farewell, a long farewell!  
You shall never see my living face again.

**[\*Polynices’s request previews Antigone's motivation in *Antigone*.]**

**ANTIGONE:**Ah me!

**Polynices:**Bewail me not.

**ANTIGONE:**Who would not mourn  
Thee, brother, hurrying to an open pit!

**Polynices:**If I must die, I must.

**ANTIGONE:**Nay, hear me plead.                       1580

**Polynices:**It may not be; forbear.             [forbear = keep silence]

**ANTIGONE:**Then woe is me,  
If I must lose thee.

**Polynices:**Nay, that rests with fate,              [[irony](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/terms/I/irony.htm): Polynices blames fate even after explaining his own choice]  
Whether I live or die; but for you both  
I pray to heaven you may escape all ill;  
For you are blameless in the eyes of all.

***[Exit Polynices]***

**CHORUS: *(Strophe 1)* *[Chorus moves left to right]***

**Ills on ills! no pause or rest!  
Come they from our sightless guest?  
Or may we now see fulfilled**1590 **What fate long time hath willed?**

For never proves vain  
What the heavenly powers ordain.

Time with never-sleeping eye  
Watches what is writ on high,  
Overthrowing now the great,  
Raising now from low estate.

**Hark! How the thunder rumbles!** Zeus defend us!     [thunder = [sublime](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/terms/S/sublime.htm) + [spectacle](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/terms/S/spectacle.htm)]

**http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/ximages/decor/strips/Rainbow_Thin.gif**

**[SCENE 10]**

**OEDIPUS:**Children, my children! will no messenger  
Go summon here Theseus my best friend?                                  1600

**ANTIGONE:**And wherefore, father, dost thou summon him?

**OEDIPUS:**This winged thunder of the god must bear me  
Soon to Hades.  Send and delay not.              [Hades = underworld of dead]

**CHORUS: *(Antistrophe 1) [Chorus moves right to left]***

Hark! with louder, nearer roar  
The bolt of Zeus descends once more.                   [Zeus = god of lightning and thunder]  
My spirit quails and cowers: my hair  
Bristles for fear.  Again that flare!                             [[spectacle](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/terms/S/spectacle.htm)?]  
What doth the lightning-flash portend?  
Ever it points to issues grave.

Dread powers of air!  Save, Zeus, O save!                        1610

**OEDIPUS: Daughters, for me the predestined end  
Has come; no turning from it any more.**

**ANTIGONE:**How knowest thou?  What sign convinces thee?

**OEDIPUS:**I know full well.  Let some one with all speed  
Go summon hither the Athenian prince.               [prince = Theseus]

**CHORUS: *(Strophe 2)*** ***[Chorus moves left to right]***  
Ha! once more the deafening sound  
Peals yet louder all around                                [peals = bursts of thunder]  
If thou darken our land,  
Lightly, lightly lay thy hand;  
Grace, not anger, let me win,                                         1620  
If upon a man of sin  
I have looked with pitying eye,  
Zeus, our king, to thee we cry!

**OEDIPUS:**Is the prince coming?  Will he when he comes             [prince = Theseus]  
Find me yet living and my senses clear!

**ANTIGONE:**What solemn duty would you impress on him?

**OEDIPUS: For all his benefits I would perform  
The promise made when I received them first.**

**CHORUS:** ***(Antistrophe 2)*** ***[Chorus moves right to left]***  
Hither haste, my son, arise,                           [my son = Theseus]  
Altar leave and sacrifice,                                               1630  
If to Poseidon now  
In the far glade thou payest thy vow.  
For our guest to thee would bring  
And thy folk and offering,  
Thy due reward. Hurry, O King!

**http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/ximages/decor/strips/Rainbow_Thin.gif**

**[SCENE 11]**

***[Enter Theseus]***

**THESEUS:**Why all this noise again? At once        [din = clamor, noise]  
My people call me and the stranger calls.  
Is it a thunderbolt of Zeus or sleet  
Of arrowy hail? **a storm so fierce** as this                [storm = [sublime](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/terms/S/sublime.htm) + [spectacle](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/terms/S/spectacle.htm)]  
Would warrant all suspicions of misfortune.             1640

**OEDIPUS:**You arrive much wished for, Prince, and sure some god  
Hath bid good luck attend thee on thy way.

**THESEUS:**What, son of Laius, hath chanced of new?             [What's up, Oedipus?]

**OEDIPUS: Our fate hangs in the balance. I would do all  
I promised thee and thine before I die.**

**THESEUS: What sign assures thee that thine end is near?**

**OEDIPUS: The gods themselves** are heralds of my fate;  
Of their appointed warnings nothing fails.

**THESEUS:**How sayest thou they signify their will?

**OEDIPUS: This thunder, peal on peal, this lightnin**g hurled                   1650  
Flash upon flash, from the unconquered hand.             [unconquered = almighty]

**THESEUS:**I must believe thee, having found thee oft  
A prophet true; then speak what must be done.

**OEDIPUS:**O son of Aegeus, for this state will I         [son of Aegeus=Theseus; this state=Attica, region around Athens]  
Bequeath **a treasure age cannot corrupt.**                       [transcendence > [romance](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/terms/R/romance.htm)?]  
**I myself without a guiding hand  
Will take thee soon to the place where I must end.**  
**This secret never reveal to mortal man**,  
Neither the spot nor whereabouts it lies,  
So shall it ever serve thee for defense                                        1660  
Better than native shields and strong allies.

But **those dread mysteries speech may not profane**     [[sublime](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/terms/S/sublime.htm) as what cannot be defined or expressed?]  
You must gather by accompanying me alone;  
Since **not to any of thy subjects, nor  
To my own children**, though I love them dearly,  
Can I reveal what you must guard yourself,  
And **whisper to thy chosen heir alone,  
So to be handed down from king to king.**

Thus shall you hold this land inviolate  
From the dread Dragon's brood. The justest State    [Dragon’s brood = Thebans]  1670  
By countless wanton neighbors may be wronged,  
For the gods, though they tarry, mark for doom  
The godless sinner in his mad career.  
Far from thee, son of Aegeus, be such fate!

**But to the spot—the god within me impels—**  
Let us set forth; no longer hesitate.  
**Follow me, daughters, this way. Strange that I  
Whom you have led so long should lead you now.  
Oh, touch me not**, but let me all alone        [Jn 20.17 Christ to Mary Magdalene: “Noli me tangere”]  
To find the sepulcher that destiny                      [sepulcher = tomb]           1680  
Appoints me in this land.

                                          Here, this way,  
For this way **Hermes leads, the spirit guide,**            [Hermes = messenger god]  
And Persephassa, empress of the dead.           [Persephassa = Persephone as queen of underworld]  
**O light, no light to me, but mine a while,  
Now the last time I feel thee palpable,  
For I am drawing near the final gloom  
Of Hades.  Blessing** on thee, dearest friend,  
On thee and on thy land and followers!  
Live prosperous and in your happy state                               1690  
**Still for your welfare think on me, the dead.**

***[Exit Oedipus and Theseus followed by Antigone and Ismene ]***

**CHORUS:** ***(Strophe)*** ***[Chorus moves left to right]***  
If mortal prayers are heard in hell,          [hell = Hades,Greek underworld of dead]  
Hear, Goddess dread, invisible!  
Monarch of the regions drear,  
Aidoneus, hear, O hear!                          [Aidoneus = the god Hades]

By a gentle, tearless doom                     [doom = destiny]  
Speed this stranger to the gloom,  
Let him enter without pain  
The all-shrouding Stygian plain.              [Stygian < River Styx of underworld]  
**Wrongfully in life oppressed,**1700 **Be he now by Justice blessed.**

***(Antistrophe) [Chorus moves right to left]***

Queen infernal, and thou fell                   [fell = fearful]  
Watch-dog of the gates of hell,    [watch-dog=Cerberus, 3-headed dog guarding entrance to Hades]  
Who, as legends tell, dost glare,  
Snarling in thy cavernous lair  
At all comers, let him go                      [him = Oedipus]  
Unharmed to the fields below.

For thy master orders thus,  
The son of earth and Tartarus;                         [Death was the son of Tartarus and Gaia]  
In his den the monster keep,                                      1710  
Giver of eternal sleep.

**http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/ximages/decor/strips/Rainbow_Thin.gif**

**[SCENE 12]**

***[Enter Messenger]***

**MESSENGER:** Friends, countrymen, **my message is in sum  
That Oedipus is gone, but the event  
Was not so brief, nor can the tale be brief.**

**CHORUS:**What, has he gone, the unhappy man?

**MESSENGER:** Know well / That **he has passed away from life to death.**

**CHORUS:**How?  By a god-sent, painless doom, poor soul?

**MESSENGER:** Thy question touches the wonder of the tale.      
How he moved hence, you saw him and must know;    [moved hence = walked away from here]  
Without a friend to lead the way, himself                                             1720  
Guiding us all.   
                         So having reached the abrupt  
Earth-rooted Threshold with its brazen stairs,    [threshold: into the sacred grove; brazen = brass]  
He paused at one of the converging paths,  
Hard by the rocky basin which records  
The pact of Theseus and Peirithous.                  [hero partners in many adventures]

Between that rift and the Thorician rock,              [Thorician < Thoricus, Attican city of silver and lead mines?]  
The hollow pear-tree and the marble tomb,  
Midway he sat and loosed his beggar's robe;       ["loosed his . . . robe": as though to wash in preparation]  
Then calling to his daughters bade them fetch                                 1730  
Of running water, both to wash withal  
And make [libation](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/terms/L/libation.htm); so they climbed the path;           [libation=offering]  
And in brief space brought what their father bade,  
Then washed and dressed him with observance due.

But when he had his will in everything,  
And no desire was left unsatisfied,  
It **thundered** from the underworld; **the maids**             
**Shivered, and crouching at their father's knees**            [[sublime](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/terms/S/sublime.htm) as fear]  
**Wept, beat their breast and uttered a long wail.**

He, as he heard their sudden bitter cry,                                             1740  
Folded his arms about them both and said,  
**"My children, you will lose your father today,  
For all of me has perished, and no more  
Have ye to bear your long, long ministry;**  
A heavy load, I know, and yet **one word  
Wipes out all score of tribulations—*love***.  
And love from me you had—from no man more;  
But now must live without me all your days."

So clinging to each other sobbed and wept  
Father and daughters both, but when at last                                      1750  
Their mourning had an end and no wail rose,  
**A moment there was silence; suddenly  
A voice summoned him**; with sudden dread  
The hair of all stood up and all were amazed;  
For the call came, now loud, now low, and oft.  
**"Oedipus, Oedipus, why tarry we?**                                      [tarry = delay]  
**Too long, too long thy passing is delayed."**

But when he heard the summons of the god,  
**He prayed that Theseus might be brought**, and when  
The Prince came nearer: "O my friend," he cried,                               1760  
**"Pledge ye my daughters, giving thy right hand—  
And, daughters, give him yours—and promise me  
Thou never wilt forsake them**, but do all  
That time and friendship prompt in their behalf."

And he of his nobility repressed                                            [he = Theseus]  
His tears and swore to be their constant friend.  
This promise given, Oedipus put forth  
Blind hands and laid them on his children, saying,  
"O children, prove your true nobility  
And **hence depart nor seek to witness sights**    [hence = from this place]   1770  
**Forbidden** or to hear forbidden words.  
Nay, go with speed; let none but **Theseus stay,  
Our ruler, to behold what next shall happen."**

So we all heard him speak, and weeping sore  
**We companied the maidens on their way.**  
**After brief space we looked again, and lo  
The man was gone, nowhere to be seen;  
Only the king we saw with upraised hand  
Shading his eyes as from some awful sight**,                 [awful = awesome, [sublime](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/terms/S/sublime.htm)]  
That no man might endure to look upon.                                     1780

A moment later, we **saw him bend**                               [him = Theseus] **In prayer to Earth and prayer to Heaven at once.**  
But by what doom the stranger met his end                   [doom = fate; the stranger = Oedipus]  
No man save Theseus knoweth.  For there fell  
No fiery bolt that reft him in that hour,                             [reft = broke]  
Nor whirlwind from the sea, but he was taken.  
**It was a messenger from heaven, or else  
Some gentle, painless cleaving of earth's base**;              [cleaving = opening]  
For **without wailing or disease or pain  
He passed away**—an end most marvelous.            [cf. transcendence of [romance](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/terms/R/romance.htm)]       1790  
And if to some my tale seems foolishness  
I am content that such could count me fool.

**CHORUS:**Where are the maids and their attendant friends?

**MESSENGER:** They cannot be far off; the approaching sound  
Of lamentation tells they come this way.

**http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/ximages/decor/strips/Rainbow_Thin.gif**

**[SCENE 13]**

***[Enter Antigone and Ismene]***

**ANTIGONE: *(Strophe 1)*** ***[Chorus moves left to right]***

Woe, woe! on this sad day  
     We sisters of one ruined stock                [stock = lineage]  
     must bow beneath the shock,  
Must weep and mourn the curse that lay  
     On him our sire, for whom                                      1800  
In life, a life-long world of care  
     Was ours to bear,  
     In death to face the gloom  
     That wraps his tomb.  
**What tongue can tell  
That sight ineffable?**                                      [ineffable = inexpressible (cf. [sublime](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/terms/S/sublime.htm))]

**CHORUS:**What mean ye, maidens?

**ANTIGONE:**All is only speculation.

**CHORUS:** Is he then gone?

**ANTIGONE:**Gone as anyone might wish.                         1810  
Not in battle or sea storm,  
But **taken from sight,**                       **By hands invisible borne**  
To viewless fields of night.  
Ah me! on us too night has come,  
The night of mourning.  Where now  
Do we go in our distress  
Eating the bread of bitterness?

**ISMENE:**I know not. O that Death  
Might nip my breath,                                                1820  
And let me share my aged father's fate.  
I cannot live a life thus desolate.

**CHORUS:**Best of daughters, worthy pair,  
What heaven brings, you have to bear,  
Fret no more against Heaven's will;  
Fate hath dealt with you not ill.

**ANTIGONE: *(Antistrophe 1)*** ***[Chorus moves right to left]***Love can turn past pain to bliss,  
     What seemed bitter now is sweet.  
Ah me! that happy toil is sweet.  
     The guidance of those dear blind feet.                 1830

Dear father, wrapt forever in nether gloom,  
     Even in the tomb  
You’ll never lack  
     Her love and mine.

**CHORUS:** His fate—

**ANTIGONE:**Is even as he planned.

**CHORUS:**How so?

**ANTIGONE:**He died, so willed he, in a foreign land.  
Lapped in kind earth he sleeps his long last sleep,  
     And over his grave friends weep.                                   1840  
How great our loss these streaming eyes can tell,  
     This sorrow nothing can quell.  
You had your wish amid strangers to die,  
     But I, alas, did not stand by.

**ISMENE: Alas, my sister, what new fate  
Befalls us orphans desolate?**

**CHORUS:**His end was blessed; therefore, children, stay  
Your sorrow.  Man is born to fate a prey.

**ANTIGONE: (Strophe 2) *[Chorus moves left to right]***

**Sister, let us go back again.**      [back = into the grove where Oedipus disappeared]

**ISMENE:**Why return?                                             1860

**ANTIGONE: My soul desires—**

**ISMENE:**Desires what?

**ANTIGONE:**To see the earthy bed.

**ISMENE:**Do you mean . . . ?

**ANTIGONE: Where our father is buried.**

**ISMENE:**Nay, you cannot, don’t you see?—

**ANTIGONE:**Sister, why are you angry with me?

**ISMENE:**Don’t you know . . . besides—

**ANTIGONE:**More must I hear?

**ISMENE: Tombless he died**, none near.                      1870

**ANTIGONE: Lead me there; slay me there.**  [willingness to die anticipates tragedy of *Antigone*]

**ISMENE:**How shall I unhappy fare,                             [fare = go on]  
Friendless, helpless, how drag on  
A life of misery alone?

**CHORUS: (Antistrophe 2)** ***[Chorus moves right to left]***  
Fear not, maids—

**ANTIGONE:**Ah, where shall we go?

**CHORUS:**Refuge hath been found.

**ANTIGONE:**For me?

**CHORUS:**Where thou shalt be safe from harm.

**ANTIGONE:**I know.                                        1880

**CHORUS:**Then why this alarm?

**ANTIGONE: How again to get us home  
I know not.**

**CHORUS: Why must you roam?**

**ANTIGONE: Troubles overwhelm us—**

**CHORUS:**As of yore.                                  [yore = past, earlier days]

**ANTIGONE:**Worse than what was worse before.

**CHORUS:**Sure ye are driven on the breakers' surge.   [breakers = waves; metaphor for fate, destiny]

**ANTIGONE:**Alas! we are.

**CHORUS:**Alas! It is so.                                         1890

**ANTIGONE:**Ah where to turn, O Zeus?  No ray  
Of hope to cheer the way  
Whereon the fates our desperate voyage urge.

***[Enter Theseus ]***

**THESEUS: Dry your tears; when grace is shed  
On the quick and on the dead  
By dark Powers beneficent,  
Too much grief they would resent.**

**ANTIGONE:**Aegeus's child, to thee we pray.

**THESEUS:**What do you need, my children, say.

**ANTIGONE: With our own eyes we wish to see**1900 **Our father's tomb.**

**THESEUS: That may not be.**

**ANTIGONE:**What do you mean, O King?

**THESEUS:**My children, he  
Charged me straitly that no mortal                  [straitly = directly]  
Should approach the sacred portal,  
Or greet with funeral litanies                          [litanies = prayers]  
The hidden tomb wherein he lies;  
Saying, "If thou keepest my request,         
Thou shalt keep thy realm at rest."                                                    1910  
The God of Oaths this promise heard,  
And to Zeus I pledged my word.

**ANTIGONE:**Well, if he would have it so,  
We must yield.  Then **let us go**  
**Back to Thebes**, if yet we may    ["Back to Thebes"; i.e., to resume story told in [*Seven Against Thebes*](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/texts/Tragedy/SevenXThebes.htm) & *[Antigone](http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Whitec/texts/Tragedy/Antigone.htm)*]  
To heal this mortal feud and stay              [stay = impede, obstruct]  
The self-wrought doom                              [self-wrought = self-made]  
That drives our brothers to their tomb.

**THESEUS:**Go in peace; nor will I spare  
Ought of toil and zealous care,                                                1920  
But on all your needs attend,  
Gladdening in his grave my friend.

**CHORUS:**Wail no more, let sorrow rest,  
All is ordered for the best.

**[END]**